MICHAEL ROBERT

THE CROW FLIES FREE

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Production team
Cover Design: Roopali's Creation
Editing: Aanchl Jain
Proofreader: Michelle Kolesar
Beta Reading: Garry Michael
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This book is dedicated to Garry, my love and husband. Thank you for your love and unwavering support.

Authors Note

The completion of this book took nearly one year. In that time, I was able to spend a couple of weeks in the region where this book takes place. I did my best to represent the area as I saw it when building my story idea. Certainly, my limited views could not possibly capture the entirety of this beautiful land or its people.

My story was based on the research I did while visiting the region. I used library information, Google and my own personal experiences.

My characters are fictional and based solely on my interpretation for this book.

I wanted to write a story that featured an Indigenous peoples character. I did my best to build the character of Joey while being culturally sensitive to Native American culture. The character is not specific to that area but represents an idea I had about him living in small town America.

Any reference to Indian, Native American or Indigenous culture was based on research found in books, Google research and experiences I had growing up near reservation lands. I am proud of my characters and the way I represented them in my story. It is my hope that I was respectful, culturally sensitive and did not offend in any way. It was not my intent.

THE CROW FLIES FREE

by

Michael Robert

PROLOGUE: Unknown

Eleven Years and Six Months Ago

Sometimes at the end, you think of the beginning. I'd read somewhere that the sound of a gunshot is called *the report*. That seemed like an unusual name for something that is so loud and momentary. Of course, there is the fancy word, onomatopoeia, naming a thing or action by a vocal imitation of sound associated with it, such as *bang* or *crack*.

I had been sitting by a small campfire, my eyes reflecting the flames, when I heard a sound like that. A *pop*. Or was it two *pops?* Memory can be a tricky thing, it's easy to rewrite history, if you overthink things.

The cool summer evening had me rubbing my arms, hoping to generate heat. Underneath the pitch-black sky, dotted with points of light, eyes sweeping the empty desert below, you'd never expect to have your peace shattered. I loved the vantage point of the bluff, in an otherwise flat part of Central Oregon. Some folks might not recognize beauty in an arid, desolate environment such as this. *But… this view… made me speechless.*

Pop, flash of light. *Pop*, flash of light. Yes, that's how it happened. The haunting sound had ruptured the deadly silence, ripping through my quiet. It sure sounded like *the report*.

I've never shared the story of *that* sound with anyone. I'll never forget it though. Sometimes silence is the same as death.

Should I have spoken of it? Perhaps. But I never did.

PROLOGUE: Caleb

Eleven Years Ago

"Look daddy," I said, gesturing across the field. "Mr. Crow has a little girl with him." I was excited to see a child over at the Crow farm. Besides my one-year-old sister, there were no children for miles around our farm. I'd longed for a pal for as long as I could remember. I'd been hurriedly following my father as he walked through our fields, planning the next planting. I took off like a shot and ran across the field as fast as my little legs would take me, making a beeline for the fence along Jones Road, which separated our two farms. "Mr. Crow! Over here, Mr. Crow!" I waved my hands, crisscrossing them high in the air and yelling as loud as I could.

I had to know who the little girl was. There'd never been kids at his farm before. His house was a fair distance up a gravel drive, and he'd driven down the long driveway in his old truck to check the mail, like he'd done for as long as I could remember. But that day was different, there was a kid sitting in the old beat-up truck and I was determined to meet her. *I wonder if she likes to ride horses. I'll let her ride mine if she doesn't have one.* I was already planning our first play date. I kept my station and continued to try to get her attention. "Hello! Hello! My name is Caleb. Caleb Hollings," I yelled.

Why isn't she waving back? I was getting more frustrated by the minute. My father walked over to see what all the fuss was about.

"What has you so worked up son?" he swept the back of his hand across my small, sweaty, forehead and then wiped it on his coveralls. "You've seen Mr. Crow retrieve his mail at least a hundred times," he half scolded.

"Daddy, please give me a boost up. She can't see me, daddy. I'm tryna wave at her. I bet she's just shy."

My father looked across the road to see what I was so flustered about. I had my arms held high above my head, begging for him to

pick me up and put me on his shoulders. Surely, I could wave higher and faster from up there. Once he saw the little girl, he realized why I'd gotten so worked up. "Caleb, that's not a girl. That's Mr. and Mrs. Crow's grandson, and he's come to their farm to live with them for a while."

I looked up at him, my face scrunched up in confusion. "He has long hair, daddy," I whispered.

"Yes, he does, and it's ok," he kneeled to my height. "We need to be especially nice to Mr. Crow's grandson. He has no mommy or daddy, and that's why he's come to live with his grandparents."

"But why does he have long hair if he's a boy, daddy?" I asked, figuring I could be nice to him later; my little brain was fixated on his long hair at that moment.

"Do you remember what I told you when you asked why Mr. Crow had a ponytail?"

I paused, trying to recall the lesson. "Yes, sir."

"Well, his grandson is also an Indian and likes to wear his hair like his granddad." He narrowed his eyes in thought. "However, it's polite to say Native American, so remember that please." My father stood up and raised a hand and waved to Mr. Crow, who had just spotted us. Mr. Crow raised his arm and waved back.

I hadn't heard the last part. Indian. Native. *Be polite about something, blah blah…* I was back to staring across the road, in a trance. The kid in the truck had jumped out and was walking towards the road, staring back at me. I kept waving as he slowly reached the edge of the road. The small boy turned to look at Mr. Crow and I noticed him nod. Probably being told to stay off the road like my momma always told me. I'd never seen a boy like this in my entire seven years. He was wearing torn jeans that barely stayed up because of how skinny he was, and he was barefoot with no shirt on. "Not a girl for sure," I mumbled to no one in particular.

The boy had deep brown skin, not white like mine or my daddy's, and he had long, black hair, down to his waist. I leaned against the nearest fence post, never taking my eyes off him and waited to see what he would do next. He'd walked to the edge of the road and stopped. His head was downcast, yet he maintained his gaze.

The stranger had his hands in his pockets and made no effort to engage with me, the frown on his face making me wonder why he looked so sad.

He was standing on the edge of the road, barely fifty yards away, so I yelled as loud as I could. “Hi. Nice to meet you. I’m Caleb.” I decided to wave more too; that should let him know I wanted to be his friend. But he made no attempt to wave back. He just stood on the other side of the road, staring at me. *Maybe he can’t speak my language being an Indian and all. What had daddy said about Indians and Native Americans?* I reminded myself to ask him later.

I stood very still, not knowing what I should do and continued gazing at the little brown skinned boy. He returned my stare but remained motionless. I wanted to hug him tight because he looked so sad. He needed a friend, I was sure about that, so I smiled my best smile at him. He turned away without acknowledging me and walked back to the truck. *That didn’t work. Why won’t he wave or say hi?* I wondered, thinking maybe he wasn’t nice after all.

Just as I’d decided he wasn’t such a good boy, the mysterious stranger stopped and turned around before getting back in the truck. He lifted a hand to shield his eyes and once he had located my position, he slowly lifted his free hand up to wave back. He had the most beautiful smile I’d ever seen.

PROLOGUE: Joey

Eleven Years Ago

"Joey, you want to ride down to get the mail? I'll let you steer the truck a bit," Grandpa yelled, his voice carrying up the stairs to my bedroom.

I'd been lining my soldiers across the bottom edge of my window sill and planning my next big raid of enemy territory.

"Coming!" I hollered as loud as I could.

I was outta my room in a flash because I liked to follow my grandpa around everywhere he went. That way I could keep track of him. I didn't want him and gram to disappear as my mommy and daddy had. Gram sometimes referred to me as her shadow, whatever that meant. I grabbed Grandpa's hand and followed him to the old truck. Mommy had told me once that she never liked me to ride in Grandpa's truck because it didn't have seatbelts. That's how I knew they loved me so much because mom worried about me a lot. *I wished they hadn't gone away.*

I figured I'd just live here on the farm with my grands until they got back from their trip or whatever they were doing. There didn't seem to be any other choice anyway.

"Grandpa, you think daddy and mommy might come back soon? They know where you and gram live, so they'll be able to find me, right?"

I slid over to his side and climbed on his lap so I could hold the steering wheel. I asked them the same question every few days, even though I knew it made them sad as well. Grandpa looked just like my daddy, but he was old. He had long, straight black hair like daddy and me, but he had some silver in it like grams. She'd told me that my

daddy's eyes were exactly like Grandpa's and mine. All of us Crows possessed almond-shaped brown eyes, like most natives of the West Coast. I'd also been told that grandpa was a wise and important man. He wasn't the chief, but he was an important member of the tribe. I can't remember what it's called. Now he and gram lived on a farm. They never told me why they moved away from our great lands, but I think it was because they were sad that daddy left and took mommy with him. My daddy would be happy that I was here to help my grands out and that I was keeping an eye on them while he was gone.

My grands' house was about a half-mile from the road, and every day since I'd come to live with them, except weekends, we went to get the mail. Sometimes I'd drive us, but grandpa always did the hard-to-reach foot parts.

"The steering is the most important part, Joey," he'd say.

I saw the mailbox coming up at the end of our drive. Like most of the farms along Jones Road, the mailboxes sat at the end of driveways, usually in buckets of cement or rocks. Grandpa said people tried to knock them over so that's why ours sat in a big bucket of cement.

"Hey, grandpa, who's that kid over there?" I pointed at a boy walking in a freshly plowed field, a man walking ahead of him. The grownup stopped and kneeled occasionally, feeling the dirt and staring into the distance, across the dirt clod filled field. Probably his daddy. *I wish I could see my daddy.* The thought made my heart hurt but I didn't want to cry again in front of grandpa.

"That's the Hollings boy and his father, Mr. Hollings. They live on the farm across the road. See that house over there?" He pointed to a big structure across the field. It looked just like our house and every other farmhouse in these parts—two stories high and painted white with a large patio up front. Most of them sat near a barn. He parked the truck about twenty-five feet from the road and got out and walked over to get the mail. I stared at the boy across the road. He'd been jumping up and down, waving like a crazy person once we'd stopped. It seemed he was excited to see grandpa, or maybe a bee had got stuck in his overalls. He was acting like a wild banshee as far as I was concerned.

I pulled the door lever in to open it and slammed my tiny body against the door to unjam it and jumped out of the truck to get a

closer look. Grandpa saw me walking toward the road and reminded me to stay clear of it. I nodded and inched closer. The boy reminded me of a ghost or possibly an angel. His skin and hair were so white that I had a hard time making out any features on his face. He appeared to be glowing in the sunlight. We didn't have kids like him at my former reservation school. *I wonder where he came from.* I'd ask grandpa if he was one of those kids from the North Pole. I'd read a story about the people that lived in the snow, they had super white skin and even white hair. *Probably one of them.*

My mind was whirring with ideas while he just stood by the fence and kept staring. At least he had finally stopped waving. I hadn't ever seen a boy like him, he was too pretty to be a real boy. The more I stared at the unusual being the more he reminded me of an angel. I thought about momma and how she'd told me about angels.

"Joey, you never know when you might see an angel. And, if you do, make sure you're on your best behavior because angels are special beings. They come down to earth and they protect and guide us," she'd said.

Maybe he was an angel, but I didn't see any wings, so I wasn't sure how to figure that part out or how to act in front of him if he were.

Grandpa waited by the truck after grabbing the mail, watching me as I stood there staring back at snow boy. I could sense he was having one of what he called *his visions*. His eyes would get misty, his face would freeze, and his eyes would narrow, alerting me that he was in deep thought about the vision he was seeing. That's why he was like a chief; he could see stuff other people couldn't.

I'd had enough of this staring and waving business, so I walked back to the truck. Grandpa was still standing there looking at me and then back across at the angel boy. *That's what I'll call him... Angel Boy.* I turned around again, just in case he was an angel, figuring I'd better give him my best smile and even a wave back. I needed an angel and maybe this one would help me find my mommy and daddy.

Grandpa used the steering wheel to gently pull himself into his seat, while I climbed in the other side. He twisted the key to start the engine and turned his head toward me, a knowing smile spread across his face.

CHAPTER ONE: Caleb

Present Day

Joey was standing on the rock when I rounded the last curve of the trail that led to our favorite giant monolith. I hopped off my bike and let it travel a few feet farther before crashing into the brush. As usual, I'd ridden it to the Cove Palisades on my lunch break. Joey stood high on the rock, bare-assed, also as usual. This time of summer, the only part of his body not a deep shade of brown was his perfect butt, which was two shades lighter than his deeply tanned back. It was round, smooth, and had a muscular dimple on each cheek. He had the perfect body, in my inexperienced estimation. *Stop your sinful thoughts Caleb, or you're going to hell.*

Joey and I met at the big rock, our rock, as we referred to it, every summer day during our lunch breaks. The massive rock was one of the dozens strewn along the river. Tens of thousands of years ago, the stones had been deposited by the retreating ice that carved the canyon. Many of them possibly rolled down the plateau, hundreds of feet above the point where three rivers merged. Our rock was about twenty feet high with a perfectly flat top, excellent for lying on or diving from. It was located off the main road, at the bottom of the long hill into the Cove Palisades State Park, and just before the public boat launch. Our private oasis was also secluded by tall trees—you needed to know about the trail that hid it from the road to find it. We liked the privacy and had staked it out as our very own when we were thirteen years old.

Joey worked at the marina a few hundred yards to the north and walked over to the rock every day. He had beaten me there again. The breeze was warm, and the sun was beating down mercilessly. The sounds of powerboats and jet skis echoed loud through the river canyons.

I felt my privates getting aroused at seeing him naked. I would never refer to my privates as dick, cock, or any other name from the long list Joey had for his. So far, I'd heard cock, dick, knob, tool,

schlong, missile, meat, third leg, Johnson, and little Joey. One thing was certain though, it wasn't little.

He twisted in the air as he spun toward the water. "Yeeehaawww!"

I heard the splash from his cannonball, then a brief pause until he resurfaced, his familiar tough-guy voice traveling up the rock. I placed my towel and bottles of water next to his.

"Dump your farm duds, angel boy, and get your sweet ass down here," he yelled. He was egging me on to strip because he knew how bashful I was about being naked.

"You're built like a shit brickhouse, dude." I think that was how he had so tastefully put it yesterday while horsing around at the river. I'd hung my head in embarrassment, wondering if that was a good or bad thing. *"Shit dude! You don't even work out, how the fuck do you get so buff?" He motioned up and down my body, making a V-shape with his hands and touched a few of his favorite parts. He always ended by squeezing my biceps.*

He reached out to grab my arm and then bent it behind my back while he twisted me around, holding me tight from behind. He was leaner, but that didn't mean he was stronger. I knew if I tried hard enough, I could easily escape his grasp, but I didn't because I hungered for the skin-to-skin contact. He was still pressed against my back, pushing against my exposed butt with his privates. The sensation of his firm erection against my naked butt was electric. The size was easy to measure because the pressure points gave up its location and size.

"You're perfect, Angel. Every single inch of you is pure muscle, and I fucking love looking at you," he growled in my ear.

I was froze in excitement at being so close to him. His naked torso was grinding against my backside. His voice, which had deepened significantly these past few years, sounded like a hungry wolf, low and rumbling, with a slight snarl. It made my privates stir, my response to him, clearly growing evident. Feeling queasy, my knees got weak at hearing him speak about my body that way. He said things to me that embarrassed and excited me at the same time.

Joey always built me up with flattering words, and I still hadn't gotten completely comfortable with it. *"Caleb, you're such a good*

person, I love being with you," he stated, not ashamed to admit his feelings. "I'm not sure why you like me, but it sure does make me happy as fuck that you do." The feel of him pressing into my back felt amazing and nerve-wracking. I'd begun to recognize the stirring feelings in my stomach when we touched like this. Warning bells went off, but the pleasure overrode fear.

I never understood why he was so modest. I loved him with all my heart and couldn't imagine that everyone didn't see him exactly the way I did. He was nothing like the other guys at school. He didn't care how he spoke to me with others around and was never concerned with how they might interpret his words. He was tender with me, protective, kind, and he spoke from his heart. You knew precisely where you stood with him because he spoke his truth, one hundred percent of the time. That's the side of Joey Crow that I got. Other folks, well… I imagined they saw him as a bit rough around the edges, tough, aloof and private. Joey had deep scars that other people couldn't see, or he didn't let them see, I should say. He had reasons to be cautious with the love he gave and his ability to trust in it.

Summers in Central Oregon were hot and dry. The closer it got to September, the hotter it got. The land became bare and dry as the red earth cracked from the oppressive heat. Springtime grass withered and plants turned lean, knowing they'd need to suffer through another wicked summer. After the ride down from the farm, I was sweaty and sticky. The perspiration in the small of my back was sticking to my tee shirt, so I removed it, looking forward to the cool river. The sun on my bare chest felt nice, and even with a fair complexion, blond hair and blue eyes, I'd managed to get a tan. Joey's calls brought me back to the present and I glanced down, noticing his eyes on me.

"I don't know why you fucking hide your stud muffin-ness under those damn overalls," he cursed, despite knowing full well that my strict father demanded modesty. '*Functional and appropriate attire is required of young Christian men,'* father preached. I was torn between my church upbringing and my excitement at how Joey looked at me when I was naked. I knew my father would whoop my butt if he knew what I was about to do, but the draw of Joey was too much for my desires to be quashed by the bible.

Conscious of his gaze, I nervously moved my hands to my waist and released the two metal buttons on each side. They fell loosely off my hips, leaving me standing on the rock in my plain white boxers. I eyed the edge again where Joey was standing in waist deep water, his

brown skin made darker by the water streaming against him, his deep brown eyes intense as he gazed up at me. He squinted ever so slightly from the sun's reflection off the water. There was something curiously different on his face today as he studied me. I felt like a sacrificial lamb being stalked by a coyote. It was slowly edging forward, sliding its tongue over its teeth, anticipating its next meal. He continued to stare up at me, his eyes wide, and questioning. With longing in them, they remained steady on me, anxious for what might come next. Joey had seen me naked hundreds of times at least, but it felt as if it was the first time. He was expectant and intent on taking in every inch of my body. It unnerved me when he subconsciously wet his lips with his tongue, his mouth gaping and his eyes waiting, still watching my every movement. I turned shyly away from him with my back to the water. I was unsure of myself and wondered why. I modestly pushed my boxers down to my ankles and bending slightly, stepped out of them. I was aware that my bare white ass was in full view, it couldn't be helped. I cupped my privates with my hands and faced him.

"Aww shit, Angel! Why'd you go and do that?" he said, slapping his hands on the water. "I was just beginning to enjoy the show."

Never wanting to disappoint him, I removed the hands that covered my privates and raised my arms high above my head. *You want a good view? Well, here I am!* He grinned up at me, nodding nastily in agreement. Both actions gave me all the approval I needed. I let out a loud war cry and joined him in the water after a sleek dive from high on the rock. I entered the water with barely a splash and disappeared into the calm river, resurfacing right beside him. Water dripped down my face and I spat some out.

I opened my eyes in time to see him place his hand to my forehead, pushing my longer than usual hair out of my eyes. "Time for a haircut." He spoke softly, after realizing how long it had grown. My skin tingled as his hand lingered on my face. "Happy birthday, Angel." Today was my eighteenth and he had remembered. "I got something for you, but you'll have to wait until I come over tonight," he said, raising his eyebrows suggestively.

It wasn't odd to me that Joey commented on my hair length. Others might think it strange that two guys noticed those things, but not us, we noticed every aspect of each other's bodies. We took ownership over the other and never cared how it must have looked to other people. We shared everything about our lives, nothing was

private between us. It had been that way since we were seven.

"Why the fuck wouldn't I touch him?" he'd barked at someone taking issue with his behavior. "I don't give a rat's ass, and if you gotta problem with it, just lemme know."

It was who he was in our small town. You just didn't mess with the Crow kid. There was an edge to Joey Crow and most folks didn't see the Joey that I saw. He was guarded about most people. It was difficult for him to trust people and take the risk of loving someone or being loved. I'd spent the last decade proving to him that he could trust me and my affection for him. His status as a minority Native American in a nearly all-white town had made him sensitive to labels and bullies and despite his hesitant nature, he chose to stand up to it.

He moved closer to me, wrapping an arm around my shoulder, a move designed to pull me closer to him. My cool skin, fresh from the water, absorbed the heat from the sun-dried warmth of his torso. His long damp hair was sticking to his head and neck, framing his high boned cheeks and soft full lips. Usually, this was where he would roughhouse with me or try to wrestle me under the water. Any excuse for us to touch each other's naked bodies, but not this time, he pulled me in close gently. He turned to face me, removing his arm from around my neck and brought his hands up to grip my shoulders. He hesitated as his eyes searched mine. I gulped and felt breathless when our chests came together. The connection of our bodies felt natural to me, and I longed to hold him but was unsure of how to proceed. Our quiet breathing moved in unison, in and out, in and out, as if our lungs had synced with our heartbeats. I felt his thing grow against my hip. Startled and embarrassed by it, I responded to his comment about my hair, breaking the heated silence.

"No haircut this summer," I whispered.

He ignored my words, his hands sliding down to my naked hips, six inches below the surface. He gripped each one tightly, and with gentle force, pulled me even closer. Our exposed privates touched, and I felt his silky smoothness against mine, the solid flesh pressing and throbbing, fighting with mine for dominance. *Oh! God, this feels good. Hell… Caleb, you are going to hell!* Aware that we were rubbing against each other, I was confused as to what to do next.

"My father says now that I'm eighteen, I can grow it longer. Just not over my collar. You know, church and all." I attempted to

stay on the topic of my hair, willing myself to resist any pleasure from his stiff penis. Joey, confused by the transition, stared at me for a moment and gave up after my second backtrack to the hair. He knew I was nervous and unsure of what was happening between us. I felt his erection subsiding.

"You're handsome either way, Angel," he murmured quietly. He let go of my hips and relaxed his hands, making crisscrossed waves with them.

Searching for any distraction I could find, I concentrated on the roar of a powerboat in the distance and wondered if Joey had fueled it earlier. I tried to divert my mind thinking about how many tourists were on it, where they came from, were they from town or visiting—anything to take my mind off his touch. I was confused by what had happened and I was trying to get a grip, when he suddenly extended one of his sun-darkened hands and touched the side of my face. I prepared myself in case things got exciting again. He inched forward and slid a finger over my cheek until he stopped at a specific spot. I felt his warmth again as our bodies reconnected.

"Hey, pretty boy, your money maker is bleeding." His voice was low and tender.

I instinctively reached up and covered his hand with mine. Our fingers lingered for a moment as our eyes met. I felt his erection, once again upright, and pressing against my abdomen. My own penis was stiff and rubbed against his.

"Are you sure you're ok, Angel?" he asked, removing his hand from my face to look at his finger. I tilted my head down and saw the smear of blood on his fingertip.

"It must have been the blackberry bush that nailed me when I rode in." I gazed back into his chocolate brown eyes. I placed my hand on the spot he had touched. Joey stared at the blood on his finger, his eyes narrowing, as he mulled something over in his mind. I remained motionless as he brought the bloody finger to his mouth and rested it a moment on his lower lip. His eyes questioned mine, one eyebrow raised, asking for permission. A grin took shape on his face as he casually pushed the finger past his lips.

"Mmm," he moaned, yanking it out with a pop, "there! You're inside me now. We are bonded forever, by blood."

I gave nothing away as I stared into his eyes. The odd gesture hadn't freaked me out; it was typical Joey. "Besides," he whispered, pressing his lips on my cheek and mouthing the words onto my skin, "we can't have any scars on angel boys beautiful face, now, can we?"

The hair on my arms stood up as I felt his lips on my skin. His breath was sweet and tangy from having downed a Mountain Dew. He slid his wet tongue across my face, stopping at my ear. Our guy parts were back and standing at full attention, anticipating an underwater duel. My erection throbbed against his and I felt weak and dizzy, my head spinning, struggling with the rush.

"Uh Joey, this is uh, well…" I fumbled with the words and my erection pulsed harder. As I tried to make sense of my speech, he laughed out loud and pushed me away.

"You're ok, tough guy, there ain't no scars on that pretty face, so don't worry, the girls will still wanna marry you." He paused, scanning my naked torso. "Wait… a… second," he smiled slyly and backed away to take full measure of me. "Actually, you could use a scar." He paused again. "Because you're actually prettier than most of the girls in our town!"

And with that, he squealed, grabbed me around the neck and dunked my head in the water. I came up spitting. Girls? He knew I didn't have a girlfriend and I didn't think I wanted one. Why had he stopped the incredible moment we were having? What about our privates? It was all so sudden and now I was even more confused.

He stopped laughing and watched as I wiped water out of my eyes, disappointment evident on my face. "What? That was funny. You mad bro?" Stepping forward, he reached out to grab me again, but I batted his hand away and backed away. I was done with the dunking and roughhousing. My feelings were hurt, and I had questions. I absent mindedly moved my hands, splashing water.

"I'm heading up, you can come if you want."

He only nodded.

We waded around to a sloped part of the rock that was easier to climb than the one we had jumped from. The sun was in mid-sky, beating down on the rock.

“Fuck!” he cried, “it’s hot as hell on here!”

After we scaled the rock, I laid both of our towels out and made sure both were side by side. We lay down, both of us naked, our bodies absorbing the bright sunshine. Joey mentioned something about how he needed a breeze, or he might die right then and there. I drained most of the water we had, saving the last swig for him. His voice had switched to normal, laid-back, easygoing Joey along with the conversation.

A narrow channel from the river led into our private swimming oasis; it was lined with large boulders and thick brush. Even though the cove was part of the actual river, it felt like a small private lake. If anyone found their way in, we always had plenty of time to secure our clothing.

Joey disregarded my desire to be so close to him. Even though I was shy, I adored him and couldn’t help myself. But something between us was off and I couldn’t put my finger on it. I was nervous and my gut felt queasy. We touched each other a lot, cuddled, stuff like that, all the time. That wasn’t new, but lately, we were graduating our affections and I was clueless what it meant. We never spoke of the terms or conditions of our affectionate ways, and we never labeled anything either.

I guess we’re best friends that really liked each other. I had zero idea of what label would best describe us anyways.

We were lying close, our arms and legs touching, while I longingly stared at his bare physique. His head was turned away from me toward the river. “Are you staring at my ass again?” he teased. “Go ahead, you can touch it if you want, dude. I don’t mind.” The suggestive voice was back.

Still flummoxed at the change in Joey’s behavior, I turned away from him without answering and gazed into the trees that separated us from the main road. The hundred-yard-long path was overgrown in the summer and as far as I knew, my bike and I were the only ones on it. Joey rolled onto his back, closer than before. He scootched over as close as he could until our bodies were joined, still a bit wet, the coolness of his skin felt refreshing against my side.

“Don’t you dare burn that sexy ass of yours, handsome.”

I couldn't bring myself to face him. I wanted so badly to sneak a peek at his privates in the daylight. I was so close I could have reached over and touched it. *Would you like that Joey?* He brought his hand up and laid it on my lower back, just above my butt. The unexpected action delivered a shock wave directly to my penis. He softly moved his fingers over the small of my back, caressing my smooth skin and I felt my penis growing against the rock. *Oh, my lord.* A vision of my father thumping his bible at me in disgust passed through my mind. What would I do about my erection if I were forced to stand or roll over? *Do I ignore the hand? Do I roll over to face him? Do I make a joke? What am I supposed to do?* My body was tense with anticipation as I felt the weight of his hand gliding closer and closer toward my butt.

He'd never done such things to me in daylight. We'd been doing some serious cuddling lately when he snuck over at night, but this was out in the open, and stark daylight. *What should I do? What if he's pranking me?* My brain was in overdrive. He inched his hand lower, bringing it to rest on one of my butt cheeks. His entire palm spread over one muscular cheek, squeezing it.

"Is this, ok?" he whispered nervously.

I was immobile while my penis throbbed against the towel. *What's next Joey?* I was excited as well as dreading what he might say if I had asked that question out loud.

"Caleb? I need to ask you something, but I'm sorta fucked up about it and I'm afraid to bring it up." My heart stopped, his hand still firmly on my butt. "We've been best friends our whole lives. We're awfully close, right?" I lie very still, saying nothing in return. "It's just… well… lately I've been feeling something different when I'm with you." He poked an elbow gently into my side. "Can you turn over and look at me?"

He rolled over to his side expectantly. I lifted my head and turned to my left, bringing my head to rest on my arms once again. I remained on my stomach, hiding my shrinking erection, his face was only inches away. Up close, I stared at his high cheek bones and brown skin, kissed with redness from the sun. He had the brightest white backgrounds surrounding his brown pupils. *God, you're so beautiful.* Tears welled up in his eyes as he struggled to get up the nerve to say something. The sudden seriousness alarmed me. The

thumping of my heart pulsed in my ears.

"Come on, Joey, what's wrong?" I asked, tying to keep my own fluster out of my voice. "Are you ok? What's up with you today?" I waited for a response, afraid of any bad news. He bit his lower lip like he did when he was concerned and moved his hand up to push his hair out of his eyes, tucking a few strands behind his ear. Several wet strands still dangled in front of his other eye, the ends swelling with water.

He cleared his throat. "Caleb, how do you feel about me? What are we doing here?" He gestured back and forth between us. "I mean, like this stuff." His eyes darted to my butt, the warmth of his hand lingering. "We lay here every day, practically on top of each other, always close and shit, I feel weird. My stomach is all butterflies right now, man." He let out an exhausted sigh and began again. "Look, I'm making myself sick over you lately, Angel. I'm thinking about you all day long at work, waiting to clock out and head home to rest, so I can sneak over to your house at night. We've been doing this shit since we were kids, dude. I come over and climb into your bed and the first thing you want is for me to wrap my arms around you and spoon with you." He took a deep breath. "And lately, I'm feeling some different shit." I continued to look at him trying to read what that meant. Lowering his voice, he added, "Look, I know you can feel my boner through my boxers when we're snuggling in your bed. I feel you pressing your ass back into it. What does that mean?" He hesitated and looked off into the distance for a moment before realigning his eyes with mine. "I dig it, but shit, we aren't kids, dude, and I'm wondering if this is fucked up or wrong. What are you feeling about it?"

I was dumbfounded by his outburst. *What had he just described? What was he saying about our friendship?* "You're my best friend, I don't feel wrong when I'm with you," I whispered.

That must've been the wrong response after all the pent-up feelings and frustration he'd just expressed. His body involuntarily shivered, and I heard the beginning of anguish in his throat. Just then, a well of water formed in his eyes and a single, heavy tear sliced a wet trail along his nose, landing on his top lip before falling to its death on the sizzling rock. I wished I could kiss it away because I knew he was hurting. It was then that I understood the hungry look from the river today.

"I… I don't even know if we're feeling the same way about each other," he said, his voice low as though someone would overhear his confession. *What did he mean, the same way about each other?*

I rolled onto my back, my erection long gone, and reached for my boxers. Things had changed this summer, that was true. For one thing, Joey and I had grown into men. But why after all these years, did he need to know what our relationship meant? Labels, names? We'd never used them before, and I sure didn't know what to call it. Why'd he bring all this stuff up now? Was it because of my eighteenth birthday? Maybe he felt that turning eighteen was an important day. Was that it? Was all this because I'm a man? But I was no different today than I was any other day. He must have meant that we couldn't be playfully rubbing and touching each other, now that we were eighteen, and that didn't help my fear of losing him. I wanted *that kind* of friendship; I had known that for years now. I loved Joey.

After ten years of being around him, I knew he wasn't the type to make fun of me in hurtful ways. His way was to be kind to me even during arguments. He hated to see me hurt, especially if he felt he caused it. He handled me with kid gloves because he knew I needed it. That is who he was, and I depended on that. I also knew he wasn't trying to hurt my feelings with his questions, but I sure didn't know what all the talk meant.

"What are you saying, Joey?" I searched his face. "Why'd you just touch me the way you did if you think it's wrong? Do you want me to do the same stuff back?" I wasn't sure how to learn those things. I couldn't exactly look up adult-type things at my strict house. We didn't even have a computer.

"A young man has too many distractions from the devil, to add to them with a computer," my father had stated, after I inquired about us getting one.

He looked hurt or angry, I couldn't tell which. "My lunchtime is over," he said. "You don't get it. I already know we're best friends for Christ's sake! Everybody fuckin' knows that." He sat up and gazed out over the cove, before turning back to me. "Well then, ok, I guess that has to be enough."

Joey grabbed his shorts and tank top and stood up. His tall lean body towering over me in all its devastating beauty. There couldn't be

another boy anywhere on the planet that looked this exotic, this heartbreakingly handsome. Even his penis looked regal as he stood there. My heart broke at the thought of disappointing him. I adored him so very much and needed him even more than that.

His face betrayed an anguish as he tilted his head down to look at me. “I gotta go before this shit gets even weirder.” He stepped into his gym shorts, stuffed his tank top into his waist band and bounded off the rock, not looking back. My tear-filled eyes watched as he jogged away, disappearing into the brush along the trail to the marina.

CHAPTER TWO: Caleb

1:15 pm. I was going to be late getting back to the farm. My father was not a patient man and refused to accept excuses when it came to honoring one's commitments. Deep in thought about my odd exchange with Joey, I wasn't concentrating during the uphill climb home. And before I knew it, I had run over a broken off piece of asphalt and crashed my bike, tumbling off the edge and landing fifteen feet below. I felt a sharp pain in my ankle. It had started to bruise by the time I looked down. Stabbing pain, combined with an increasing numbness in my foot had me convinced that I had seriously injured it. Scratches and debris decorated the skin that wasn't covered by my overalls. My shoulders, elbows and chin were covered with several scrapes, some weeping blood. I couldn't see any other injuries, no broken bones that I could tell, so overall the fall could have been much worse. I rarely wore a shirt when riding in the summer heat, so the exposed skin took the brunt of the carnage. The steep road heading up and out of the cove led to the plateau where our farm was located. The climb home was the worst part of my lunch break, but it sure helped to keep me in shape. I felt a slight tingle in my bottom lip and placed my hand on my mouth, only to find blood resting on my fingertip when I pulled it away.

My bike was not in sight, so I assumed it must still be a little ways up the embankment. I tried standing but my ankle screamed with pain. It wouldn't be up to carrying me up the rock-strewn hillside. I gingerly sat back down to give myself a moment to figure out how I was going to climb out of there.

It's hot as Hades out here. I for one had already finished two bottles of water while at the rock and was not sure what I was going to do about hydrating if I was stuck in the heat for too long. My parents didn't allow me to carry a cell phone, so calling home wasn't possible. I sat there gazing over the canyon and down at the boat launch. No way Joey would notice me sitting on the hillside; he was at least a mile away. After wallowing in my own pity party, I heard the crunch of gravel above me, and a vehicle came to a stop. The outline

of its top was unmistakably an X5. I knew the body lines of every BMW from memory. I loved them and the car magazines they appeared in. Most guys hid naughty magazines under their beds. I hid car magazines underneath mine because my father forbade me to covet expensive automobiles. I sat on the microwave oven sized boulder and stared up the hill and into the glare of the sun. A door slammed shut and the outline of a man's form appeared, he was backlit by the summer sun. He stood on the edge and brought his hands to his brow to form a visor against the sun.

"Hey, are you alright?" he yelled. "I take it this is your bike?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry if it was in your way," I shouted back.

I felt exposed, embarrassed and weak. *Where was my tee shirt? Being naked in front of strangers is the vanity of the devil.* I heard my father's voice in my head. "I'm not feeling well, sir. I think I may have seriously hurt my ankle. It's aching something awful," I managed to choke out. I hoped the stranger had not heard the change in my voice. I had gone from my deep but boyish voice to sounding like a three-year-old.

"Sit tight and don't move, ok? I'm coming down for ya," he yelled back.

As he gingerly made his way down the rock-strewn hillside, I noticed he was fit. The loose rock and red dirt gave way to his weight, causing small avalanches of debris. His legs were lean and muscular like runners' legs. Not too thick, and with sinewy muscles flexing in all the right places as he descended. The bright blue tank top was tight and outlined his muscular and smooth chest. He had biceps nearly as large as my own and it was clear he'd been enjoying the sun as well. His bronzed skin was glowing a bit red and was slightly moist like he had oiled up. He gave off the energy of one of those rich, clean city types my father liked to call soft. *Pretty men with tight clothes. Probably never worked an honest day in their lives because they're too busy sinning.*

He squatted down in front of me and touched my knee lightly. I instinctively pulled back, shocked by his tender touch and the caring way he examined me. Mmm… you smell nice, like laundry soap. Yeah, that was it, but expensive laundry soap. Maybe my father was right about these city folks. Even his fingernails were clean and appeared to have clear varnish on them.

I was electrified by his touch, and I continued to stare at the masculine hand on my knee. How could a man be out here in the desert of Oregon in this heat, looking like he'd just walked out of one of those fancy fashion magazines for men? The handsome man smiled at me with a gentle hint of sadness after realizing I appeared to be in rough shape.

"You must be hurting," he said, as his hands silently slid down my leg to my swollen ankle.

Geesh, this guy is handsome. I wanted to sniff him all in, right then and there. His hair was perfect, in that expensively, just cut, paid too much to look slightly windblown and tousled sort of way. Everything about him had a polished look. I had visited a Nordstrom store with my mother when we went to Portland for a family shopping trip. The place was full of professional men that looked exactly like this guy—handsome and suave. I struggled to see his eyes through what appeared to be expensive black sunglasses. Prada's logo was embellished on the side of the glasses. Fancy stuff.

He was about to say something when a Wilson Oil semi-truck geared down as it headed down the long hill to the marina. We both paused waiting for the noise to subside. It gave me an opportunity to take more of his handsome body in. Everyone in town knew the Wilson family and their successful fuel operation. They stopped by our farm twice a month in the summer to refuel the large tanks for our farm equipment.

"This appears to be a bad sprain. I am going to manipulate your ankle, young man. If it hurts, just let me know and I'll ease off." His bronzed hands were moving and squeezing up and down my ankle. "Here, can you feel this?" he asked. "Does it hurt if I twist this w…"

"Ouch!" I yelped. My leg jerked. "Oh, geesh, I am so sorry, sir." I had managed to thank the kind man with a swift kick to his privates.

He sucked in a deep, surprised breath and paused for a moment. His eyes were squeezed shut. After a second or two he moved his free hand up to massage his privates. My eyes followed his hand until it held a rather large lump in his shorts. The action aroused me, and it wasn't lost on me that this was exactly how I felt around Joey. He continued holding my foot while his eyes scanned my body.

Remembering I was shirtless with only my overalls on, I

blushed crimson. Additional warmth flooded my sun kissed face. He slid his glasses down to the end of his nose to get a clear look at the harshness of my injuries. I took the opportunity to assess his eyes—they were blue. Not the typical blue, but a deep royal blue like the deepest parts of the river I swam in every day. I sat in silence as he gave me the once-over. I thought of my little sister and what she would say about the stranger. Rebecca would've called him Ken Doll. She named every handsome man she saw Ken Doll. He lowered my foot, careful not to hurt me, back to the ground and stood up. Smiling down at me with the most amazing smile, he extended both of his hands, offering to pull me up. I allowed him to help me to my feet, our faces inches apart.

"Hi, I'm Landon and I'm going to fix you right up," he said, with a smirk.

How we managed to get up the steep hillside with me on a lame ankle, still escapes me. But there I was, sitting on the tailgate of his X5, hatch raised above our heads, affording us some desperately needed shade. He had half carried, half dragged me up the hill in his arms. He smelled even better up close. Landon wasn't bigger than me, in fact, he was slightly less muscular, but he had me on height and determination.

"You're a big kid; workout much?" Even his laugh seemed muscular somehow, deep and guttural, evoking a strange desire in me. "What's your name, young man?" he added, as he reached beyond me to a first-aid kit that all BMWs have in their trunks.

"It's Caleb, sir, and I'm eighteen... today," I said, my voice sounding unnaturally squeaky in front of his low timbre. I wondered why I'd added my age at the last second. I guess I wanted him to know I was an adult, not a kid.

"Well Caleb, if that's the case, and you really are eighteen, please don't call me 'sir'. I'm only twenty-eight, barely older than you. Happy birthday, by the way." He busied himself digging through the first-aid kit, laying the required items to the side, all the while keeping me involved in his banter.

"How do you know so much about first-aid?" Landon had poured water out of a bottle, wetting a sterile gauze pad with it. He gently lifted my chin and began cleaning my face.

"I've had EMT training. I had hoped to be a fire fighter or full-time EMT once, but my father had other plans for me." I enjoyed being that close to him while he managed my injuries.

"This looks worse than it actually is. Mostly some scratches, nothing too deep. You've cut your lip, so that'll swell a bit," he stated and continued moving my chin this way and that to make sure he got all the dirt and blood.

"Uhm, yerss, zi zink zo," I mumbled unintelligibly, trying to respond to his questions, as he held my jaw in his grip. I hope he understood that I had said, *yes, I think so,* agreeing with his intel about my swelling lip.

"Easy for you to say, kiddo," he laughed. "Now, Caleb." He looked at me cautiously. He made a show of asking me if he could pull down my overall straps to attend to my torso but before I could even open my mouth, he grabbed the two clasps that held the straps near my chest. I jumped at his touch, the sudden movement startling him. "Hey, buddy, I'm not going to hurt you. I just need to see where the blood on your overalls is coming from," he explained calmly.

I timidly dropped my hands back down to my sides as he gently released the clasps and the overalls dropped down a couple inches below my waist. I wished I'd buttoned up one more of the buttons on the overall's sides. My boxers were clearly visible, and I must have looked a mess to this guy. He let out a breath as my overalls gave way and exposed my bare chest, revealing my muscular chest and defined abdominals. I sensed he was pleasantly surprised by my ripped body and took a moment to gather himself. *What was he thinking? Was he shocked at my clothing? Did he think I was some country bumpkin that he'd come across on the side of the road?* I could tell he was working to compose himself. He used the same cloth after rinsing it and began to wipe the blood from my chest.

"Minor abrasions here too, young man, nothing too alarming. You're lucky considering the distance you rolled after falling. Smart boy wearing your helmet." He moved the cloth across my chest and then down to my abs. He stopped just above the waistband and held his hand there for an extra moment, before gently pushing it lower to get any blood that had run under the boxer's stretchy band. My privates flexed and grew, clearly outlined through the thin material. "Umm, that should do it," he mumbled, returning his flushed face to mine. Landon had the same look on his face as Joey had less than

thirty minutes ago.

He continued to refer to me as young man and I think he even said boy, once or twice. He probably saw me as some kid. Compared to him with his fancy sunglasses and his expensive BMW, I probably did seem like a kid with my old busted up bike. I'd never felt the tingly feelings going on inside my stomach around anyone other than Joey. Why did it matter to me what this guy thought about me? My heart was and always will be with Joey.

Landon was trying to stop the bleeding on one of my arms by pressing a cool damp cloth on it. He held my arm up as he pressed and waited, looking directly into my eyes.

"Where does a boy like you work out to get such an incredible body, Caleb? Other than these scratches on your body, you're damn near perfection, and you look like you spend hours in the gym; what's your secret?" he asked. "I bust my ass, and I am nowhere near your physique." He stepped back to show me his body. He looked good to me.

"I don't go to a gym," I said. I liked that this gorgeous man was standing here, inches away from me, admiring my body.

"So, just born this way?" he reached out to rub some dirt off my stomach. "Lucky you. May I?" He moved his hands to the last metal button of my overalls near my hips. Unbuttoning even one would cause them to completely slide down.

"No!" I jumped, quickly moving my hands to prevent him from releasing the buttons. "I'm sorry, Sir, but I'm fine now, I'm sure of it," I protested and pointed to the legs of my overalls. "See, no blood." There was no way I was peeling the rest of my clothes off for a stranger. Not even one that looked like him. Where would I hide my erection anyway?

"Ok. No problem," he said. He was unfazed by my indignation and continued to smile as if he was enjoying the show.

Landon put his first-aid kit away and straightened up the rear compartment. "I'm going to tie your bike to the ski rack. You can't ride it with a bent wheel and that ankle can't handle it anyway. We're going to take you to a clinic and get that ankle checked out. I'm sure it's just a sprain, but better safe than sorry," he rattled. "Do you live

nearby? Let's call your parents on my cell. I think its best they meet us at the clinic."

"No, please, I don't wanna call my folks; there's no clinic in our town anyway, so no need to worry them," I lied. There was a small clinic in Madras. "We'd have to go all the way to Bend for that." I didn't want my father to get involved. "Could you just drop me off at the top of hill? I only live a half mile down the road from there."

He laughed. "Caleb, buddy, you can't walk on that ankle, and I'm not dropping you off anywhere but your front doorstep." *Kind of bossy ain't ya?* My father wouldn't be happy about this. An injured ankle meant no farm work for me. He would scowl and then lecture me about my carelessness and my penchant for not making adult choices.

"I suppose," I acquiesced. "Can you please just drop me at the end of our drive?" I knew full well my father would be out standing in the driveway the moment he saw some fancy car driving up to the house. His arms would be crossed, and a stern stare would be my welcome home.

Landon was quiet during the drive, but I caught him staring at me whenever I looked at him. Of course, when he saw me turn his way, he quickly switched his eyes back to the road.

"So, buddy, how's the ankle?" he asked and reached across the center console to lay his hand on my thigh. "I bet a strong guy like you will heal up fast," he added. I appreciated the vote of confidence, but I was laser focused on the hand on my thigh. He gave it a tender squeeze and moved his thumb in a circular motion. He moved his eyes to the road for a second and then back to me. I felt my privates stirring in my boxers again. This was, what, my fiftieth erection so far? He hadn't bothered to move his hand away. "This ok, buddy?" he asked, smiling at me.

"Um… sure, but my leg isn't sore, it's my ankle, remember?" I hadn't known what else to say. He removed his hand and placed it back on the steering wheel. A strange look passed over his face. He appeared to be disappointed, or maybe it was anger I saw in his expression. I began to think that he wasn't used to not getting his way. I relaxed after he removed his hand, even though I had liked the feeling.

“Are you always so damn polite, Caleb?” he asked. “You’re incredibly nice, and did I mention, polite? Kind of unusual for a guy your age, don’t ya think?”

“I guess I am, sir. My father insists that I behave respectfully around adults,” I responded.

“Well, I bet he’s proud of you because you’ve got it down really good, kid!” I sat there wondering if he was being kind or insulting me. I had to admit, he sounded condescending, and it bothered me. I knew the respectful thing to do was to let it go, but I was angry.

“I just think it’s the right way to behave, sir. I don’t mean anything by it.” I turned to him, my face free of emotion, letting him know I didn’t appreciate the talking down to. Message received—Landon switched gears quickly.

“Do you have a girlfriend, Caleb? I mean, look at you. You’re an extremely hot guy. You must have dozens of babes chasing after you, right?”

“No, I don’t,” I said with no shame.

“Seriously? Looking like you? What do you like to do when you’re not farming or whatever?” He reached for his water bottle and took a big swig. “I know I’m a bit older than you, but you’re eighteen so… maybe we could hang out sometime. What you think?” His smile was kind, but I sensed something predatory about it.

“I sort of doubt my father would let me hang out with you… sir.” There I went again, being too polite for his taste. I stared out the window at the passing farmland, embarrassed that I’d confirmed that my father was the boss of me, even though I was an adult.

“Sounds like your old man is a bit tough on you. Maybe another time? I’d really like to hang out sometime, Caleb. I think we could have a lot of fun.” He reached across and tapped my knee. I wondered what he meant by fun. *Was he messing with me?* He’d been looking at me the way Joey had earlier. I thought perhaps he was just being what we called *city nice* around these parts. It was well past my usual ninety-minute lunch break; I was sure my father wouldn’t be pleased if I didn’t get home soon. I stared at Landon’s muscled arms as he guided the wheel of the SUV—smooth, tan and a bit veiny. *Very manly man type arms*. I imagined him holding me in them.

“Is this the house buddy?” He startled me out of my dream state.

“Oh yeah, sir, that’s it. Take the next right.” I pointed to our mailbox. “I’ll just get out here, sir.”

“Not happening, handsome.” He took the right turn and headed up our gravel drive. It was long, but not nearly the length of Joey’s half-mile long drive. It was lined by a shelterbelt of trees that farmers typically plant to help keep the winds at bay. If you’ve ever driven past farms and noticed where the house was positioned, you would usually see these tall, thin trees outlining the areas around the house. There were fields on either side of the graveled drive, planted with our first plant of the year, Timothy Hay. Landon came to a stop after taking the right turn, before proceeding up the drive and turned his attention to me.

“I’m serious about hanging out sometime. You’re a handsome young man, we could have a lot of fun,” he said again. I was nervous and caught off guard by his persistence.

“Thank you, maybe… sometime,” I said, confused by my feelings towards him.

“Well, you didn’t call me, sir, so that’s a start.”

We were fifty yards in, and sure enough, there came my father. His stern eyes were not pleased to see me seated in a strange vehicle. Even less so when he came around to my side of the car.

“Why have you no shirt on son?” he asked, unhappy for sure, “and what have you been involved in?” He looked across my shirtless torso and over to Landon in the driver’s seat. Landon quickly responded.

“Hello, sir. My name is Landon. Caleb fell from his bike, and he’s injured his ankle pretty severely,” he began. “I was driving by when I spotted his bike on the road and him nowhere to be seen.”

You’re doing good Landon. Keep this up, you sound like a professional. I figured my dad would like him.

“I assumed, sir, that someone had tumbled off the embankment

and down a steep cliff. I'm not sure why Caleb wasn't further beat up after such a fall." My father appeared a bit uncomfortable at his direct explanation. Probably more so with Landon's familiarity with me.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Landon," my father spoke. "I hope young Caleb here hasn't put you out in any way. My son has an adventurous spirit and sometimes he disregards safety and rules."

"It's quite alright, sir, and actually, my first name is Landon. Landon Alexander is my full name." I watched the color disappear from my father's face. It was like watching a thermometer when the temperature plummets. And from his look, it had hit zero, quickly. He appeared to have seen a ghost.

"Alexander? As in Landon Alexander Developers?" My father was barely able to articulate.

"Yes, sir. Have we met?" Landon extended his hand at the exact moment that my father pulled my door open and motioned me to exit the SUV.

"Never mind my name, Mr. Alexander. I've met your father; he knows who I am. Thank you for helping my son. What do I owe you for your service and time?" My father was obviously angry at the kind man that had rescued me.

"Nothing, of course not, sir. I am just thankful I came upon Caleb when I did. It's been no trouble at all." Landon was just as taken aback by my father's hostility as I was. *What's this about?* I was sad for me and embarrassed for my father. I grabbed his arm, struggling to get myself out of the SUV and then stood silently behind him. My father leaned into the vehicle.

"I'll be very obliged if you never set foot on this property again, Mr. Alexander."

CHAPTER THREE: Joey

I headed straight up to my bedroom after returning from work.

"You hungry Joey?" Gram yelled from the kitchen. I was already halfway up the stairs.

"Nah, just really tired, gram, long day. I can make it 'till dinner." There was no way I could sit at the table and decompress the day I'd had with my grandmother. *Gee, gram, I told Caleb I wanna fuck more. What's your opinion on the topic?*

I kicked my boots into the corner and lay down on the unmade bed. I was going nuts, obsessing over the shit I'd dropped on Caleb. I was pissed at myself for spilling the fucking beans about my feelings for him and I felt guilty as shit too. I recognized it was entirely possible that Caleb didn't get it. No wonder he was fucking confused. How could he possibly know what I was talking about, he was as pure as Oregon's winter snow. He may have appeared to be a hunk of pure muscle, which he was, but he had been sheltered his whole life by Christian rules and teachings. I figured I'd get some shuteye and try to set things straight with Caleb later that night.

Three to four times a week, I snuck outta my house and went over to Caleb's after nightfall. Once I'd cut across the field that separated Jones Road and his house, I'd tiptoe across his huge yard to the front patio where I could easily climb up to the roof. I was extra quiet now that I knew Mr. Hollings slept with a shotgun under his bed. Caleb had dropped that fucking news on me one evening when I was naked and wrapped around him like a corn husk.

I would stand on the porch railing to pull myself up to the roof that covered the patio. Caleb's window was the only one facing the front drive and was directly above the front porch roof. I suppose if someone drove past, they'd think I was robbing the joint. Thankfully, his parents' and sister's bedrooms were down the hall from him, at the other end of the house. During the summer months, he left his

window open for me, but I always tapped lightly to alert him I was there. I tossed one leg over the open windowsill and stepped through. It would take a moment for my eyes to adjust to the darkness and when they did, I stripped down to my boxers, nudged Caleb and slid into his bed.

"Scoot over Angel."

I reached for his muscular frame as he made room for me. When I was under the thin sheet, he slid over and got closer to me. We always began our evening visits telling each other about what we'd done the rest of our day after our lunchtime swim. I was usually horny as fuck with anticipation, considering what we'd been doing recently, so I summed up my afternoons in quick fashion.

"It was so fucking boring today. No one was on the river except a couple of old geezers out early fishing. One of the old assholes called me Indian boy as he thanked me for helping him launch. Same old shit, different day. It never changes around here. Coupla fuckwads," I murmured, still steamed after reliving my earlier experience at the marina. Caleb rolled onto his side to face me and put his hand on my stomach.

"This, ok?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure. It feels good."

He had a certain way of knowing how to calm me down. He was able to connect with something in my spirit and alleviate the issue. That connection had formed between us when we were seven immediately after we had met for the first time. He was aware from the very beginning that I needed to feel protected and safe. Having my parents disappear at such an early age had made me distrustful and fearful. He understood that pain from the get-go. I may have been his literal protector, but he saved me on a much larger scale, every day of my young life.

"That sucks Joey. So many of the older folks will never get used to seeing new kinds of people settling in and around Madras." Caleb was always nice about everyone.

"There's no fucking excuse for being a racist dick, is there?"

"Yeah, you're right, but everyone I know thinks you're the best

guy ever, including me. People like that don't mean to be ignorant. Least I hope not." He kept his hand assuredly on my chest, rubbing back and forth, soothing my stress.

"Shit, Angel, there you go again, you always see the best in folks, dontcha?" I teased and squeezed his neck tighter.

I tensed up when his hand moved down to my abs. I lay very still, excited as shit, and held both my arms stiff by my side. My breath was shallow with nervous anticipation as his hand ran lightly over my skin, causing tingles and goosebumps. He slid his hand past my tensed stomach and stopped to trace the outline of my oblique muscles. He had a real fascination with the sharp edges, and I had a fascination with how they pointed the way to my throbbing dick. Of course, he never went farther down. Caleb moved his fingers in and around the small crevices between the individual ab muscles, counting softly as he traced each one.

"One, two, three…"

He searched with his fingers until he found what he was looking for and then lingered on the faint trail of dark hair, disappearing into my boxers. So far that had been the border he hadn't yet crossed. We lay in silence as he explored while I murmured and moaned. The silence allowed our shared secret from having to be revealed to each other.

A couple of years ago is when we started exploring each other's bodies in new, more exciting ways. It had happened innocently after a goodnight hug. That hug didn't end right away, it extended far past the norm. While embracing, we lay in each other's arms, breathing each other in. He'd laid his head on my chest and I brought my mouth to the top of his head. I kissed his hair lightly; it was a natural progression of our affections after that. The past few months had become even more exciting. I sure as fuck liked it, and it appeared to me that he was on the same road. But when it came to discovering more, I'll just say this, he never asked if he could, and I never told him he couldn't. It was a mutual journey with no map and no directions. Neither of us knew the ultimate destination.

I brought my hands up and placed them behind my head, stretching my body. I knew this would cause my lean abs to tighten up for him, fully exposing myself to his touch. This was his cue that he could touch me freely in all his favorite areas. The only sounds in the

bedroom were the crickets outside and my low moans of pleasure. After several minutes of worshipping my body and driving me crazy, Caleb rolled over, facing away from me. This was my cue, and I scooted in behind him, bending into the mold he made for me. He kept his ass forward until I reached down into my boxers to adjust my bulging dick. He knew my rock-hard cock had to be repositioned, the head protruding from the waist band, and that it would be waiting for him. He positioned his butt against my dick, and I grabbed his hips to pull him closer. Fuck! He felt so good. He moved his round, muscular ass in a circular motion against me, grinding on my dick. My dick begged to be released from the prison of my boxers as I strained and pushed hard against his ass. I wanted so bad to pull my boxers down and rub my dick on his ass crack. I held him tight and brought my mouth to the back of his neck.

"You smell good."

He smelled like the ivory soap his folks had been supplying since I knew him. Even his hair smelled like soap. Typical Caleb, just suds up, head to toe, with the same soap. I noticed each night that his breath smelled fresh and minty, even though we hadn't kissed. I assumed this was for me, so I always did the same for him.

Caleb was built bigger than me, but I was an inch or two taller. The bulk of his muscle in his chest and his massive biceps, sculpted by hard farm work. He liked my lean arms wrapped around him and he crossed them over his chest as I came up behind him. I was his protector, a role I loved to fill since we were little boys. He did that for me too. From the day I saw him across the road, believing he was an angel, I wanted him to protect me. Now as young men, it was different, we were also hungry for each other.

I moved one arm down to his hip and my fingers dangled above his cock. I felt his back straighten as he shuddered from the possibility that I might grab it. Instead, I chickened out, like a pussy, and moved my hand back up to his chest instead.

"Jesus, Caleb! Your chest is amazing. Can you help me get pecs like these?" I rubbed one of his nipples. His ass pushed back harder at the sensation. *My cock was going nuts.* Fuckin A man! Just slide your hand down and touch his… *the thought disappeared as fast it arrived.* Then what you gonna do, Crow? You wouldn't know what the fuck to do if you did grab it. The fantasy fizzled away after my fear set me straight.

During summer, it got so damn hot in Central Oregon, we'd lie on top of the sheets. The breeze from the open window and a small fan he had on an old wooden chair cooled our skin as we snuggled. That summer, for the first time, we used the temperature as an excuse and lifted our butts off the bed to peel off our boxers like we'd been doing at the rock. Both of us were completely naked and fully exposed, available for each other's desires. I glanced down in the dim moonlight, admiring the outline of Caleb's dick. He had a big dick even when it was limp, but that night it wasn't limp for fucking sure. Wisps of blonde hair trailed from his belly button and faded into his pubes. I wanted to touch his dick so bad, maybe do something more to it. Exactly what that was, I didn't know. As we lay there in the darkened silence, our arms touched, and we gently rested our legs against each other's. Electrical currents shot down both of our crotches and each of our dicks twitched and grew after every pulse, wanting to be acknowledged by the other. "For fuck's sake, just grab his dick already, will ya?" the devil on my shoulder whispered.

Startled, I twitched and had the odd sensation I was falling, waking from my nap. Gram's cat was on the bed and jumped from the motion. She was a spoiled indoor cat named Princess; we had an outdoors barn cat named Killer, too. Damn Princess scared the crap out of me. I kicked at her, but she was faster and scurried out the door. I listened for any noises coming up the stairwell, sniffing too, wondering if gram had dinner ready. I rolled my head to the side, noticing the darkness through my window, realizing that I had slept through the night.

CHAPTER FOUR: Landon

"You ran over his fucking kid?" my dad yelled at me on the phone. "Junior, you know I need access to that man's land. What the hell were you thinking? Old man Hollings hates my fucking guts as it is, now what do you suppose he's going to do?"

I didn't bother answering his questions because I knew he'd answer them on his own. "I'll tell you what he'll do, most likely, he'll sue my fucking ass off!" Landon Alexander, the Senior, was obviously angry. It had been a week since I rescued Caleb Hollings.

"How'd you hear about this dad?" I asked, figuring a calm rational voice might diffuse his anger some.

"I was at the cove today scouting some shit out and the marina boys were talking about it. Some Indian kid that works there had heard a story of his buddy flying off a cliff on his bike and breaking his leg or some shit like that. One of the other dipshits told everyone that a fancy white German SUV ran him off the road. So, I assumed the fucker in the German SUV was you. Who else in that fucking Podunk town could afford a BMW?"

I pulled the phone away from my ear as he continued to yell.

"Calm down a second, will ya pop?" I knew the moment it left my lips that I'd enraged him more.

"Don't tell your old man to calm down, you little fucker. Did you run that little bastard off the cliff or not?"

I had learned over the years that responding angrily to my dad resulted in one thing—a very pissed off Landon Senior. "No pops, I did not run the young Hollings boy off any cliff. His bike was in the middle of the road, crashed with a bent wheel so I stopped and got out to see if he'd gone off the edge. Sure enough, he was sitting down twenty feet or so, obviously messed up. If anything, pops, I rescued

the *little bastard* as you called him."

"Well, listen up, you shit, I want you to go buy a new bike and get your ass over to the Hollings place. Kiss his ass, suck his dick, I don't give a shit what you do, but you better apologize and do it now!" My dad was seething on the other end.

I protested. "Pops, I didn't do anything wrong. Mr. Hollings knows that, and besides, he asked me when I dropped his kid off the other day to never set foot on his land again." I let the statement sink in, before asking. "Why do you suppose he said that?"

"Fuck! God fucking dammit," he screamed. I could hear him swatting his newspaper furiously against some unknown object. "Now what the fuck am I supposed to do Landon? You better fix this little problem and today!" He hung up.

Jesus! What the fuck was that? I stared blankly at the phone in my hand.

A few hours after my warm and loving chat with dear ol daddy, I knew I'd be driving the forty plus miles back to Madras from Bend in a company truck, delivering a new bike to the Hollings farm. I scanned the key tag board where all the available truck keys hung. My dad's company had twenty-two of the same blue Silverado's with the Landon Alexander logo on the side of each door. The corporate logo was a rising sun behind a simple drawing of a house. The name *Alexander* in bold letters underlined the image. Unfortunately, I grabbed lucky number thirteen. Must have been an omen and perhaps not the best set of keys to grab as I left the warehouse. I took his marching orders and went to the local bike shop in Bend.

The town of Bend is in Central Oregon, nestled to the west of the Cascade Mountains. There are a bit less than a hundred thousand residents living there. Bend itself sits at over 3,600 feet of elevation, so its winters are frigid, with temperatures in the low twenties overnight and six to eight inches of snow each month of winter. At least I was in a city where the population was larger than most of the smaller communities around here, and there was some nightlife, similar to what I was accustomed to in the more populated Portland. I didn't grow up in Bend, even though I'd spent a substantial amount of time visiting when my dad and mom would come stay at their Bend home, checking in on his numerous projects. After college, with a business major in my pocket, dad planted me there to start working

my way up in his company. Like most of my decisions, that one was also made by my father.

The Alexander Company had one of its regional offices located there. He had many big projects in the works throughout the state. The one he'd just chewed my ass off about was the new development he wanted to build near the Cove Palisades State Park. The Park is located south of Madras, a small town forty miles away, where three high desert rivers collide, creating a place like none other in the state of Oregon. The main problem he had encountered for the Cove Project was the lack of water in these parts. It is arid and dry during the summer, so the farmers divvy up the bulk of the water to irrigate their crops. Thus, he was trying to buy up land that already had permits and many of the folks around Madras didn't take kindly to big developers.

My parents' house in Bend was primarily used by them in the summer months. It sat on the Deschutes River, and they allowed me to live there with them rent free. When they were at their various homes, I had it all to myself. The place was way too big for a single guy, but *free rent,* made it a perfect home. My family's main home was on Lake Oswego, outside of Portland. A majestic northwest mansion right on the lake and with all the expensive water toys a spoiled rich kid could want. Being the only child came with big expectations and my dad drove me hard. Mom was a softy though, and I knew she disapproved of the way my dad pushed me sometimes. She was my refuge if he got to be too much. My old man had come from nothing, and with mom's support, had managed to build one of Oregon's premiere housing development companies. My mother had come to the marriage with a chunk of money and my dad was determined to prove to his in-laws that he had the skills and the drive to succeed. Most of my childhood was him working 24/7 to build his company. He had not made a ton of time for me growing up because he was focused on making sure to pay back the in-laws all the borrowed money. My grandparents got their large loans back and with big interest to boot. My dad's drive came at a cost and the cost was him not being the warmest of dads you'd ever met. He was tough, for sure, but when it mattered, he ultimately was there for me. But being his son came with a price. The tag had proven to be a challenge in social circles here in Bend. I'd been in a few local bars where I introduced myself as Landon Alexander to some stranger or a group of new friends and was immediately accosted with withering looks.

"Your dad is an asshole!" Mr. Tie-Dyed, hemp wearing fucker,

said to me just the other night. “He’s so used to getting what he wants, he doesn’t give a shit about anything but making money. He just fucking assumes he can take this majestic land and rape it in the ass for million-dollar homes for yuppie fucking golfers… Screw him!” Twelve dollar a pint IPO beer spraying out of his mouth as he spoke.

My old man hadn’t made many friends in an area of Oregon that enjoys nature and the unparalleled beauty that is abundant there. He had trampled on all the ordinances, screwed over many landowners, and flat out hated environmental protection laws and the lawyers that defended them. His reputation was earned and cemented.

“Dude go fuck a rainbow and jack your unicorn off!” I yelled in his face, as my buddy grabbed my shoulders to reel me in.

“Not worth it, Landon. Fuck him! Don’t waste your breath on earth boy.” My pal gave him his best *don’t fuck me with me, loser,* look.

“I got something for your ass, nature boy,” I added, grabbing my crotch, while being drug away.

So, there I was, tail between my legs, shopping for a new bike. I tried to find a comparable bike for Caleb based on what I remembered about his wrecked one. Of course, by the time the sexy sales guy, Ian, at Bend Bikes Inc got a hold of me, I was ready to discover everything I could about bike ownership. Ian was a flirt, and he sensed his current customer was trolling for a new boy toy. True to the *nature boy* mold, Ian was one more dude in Bend with the right amount of facial hair, tight body and expensive outdoor logo clothing. I could never tell the gay boys from the *just being friendly* crunchy granola guys of Bend. They all looked the same these days. Mid-twenties to mid-thirties, lean, not too much muscle, a perpetual five-day growth of beard, unkempt hair. It had to be North Face or Patagonia clothing, or they weren’t wearing it. Many would sleep with you if you got them high enough on some sweet organic weed. There was always the nature loving straight guy, he’d let you blow him just because he thinks he’s being nice.

“Love is love man,” the hitch-hiking, vegan dude, I sucked off last week declared, his cargo shorts down around his ankles.

I am so sick of these fuckers, why do I keep bringing them home? There’s never anything in it for me.

Maybe I'll blow you too, Ian. I could leave the free blow job offer in a note, under the wiper of the green Subaru outside. I was fairly certain the car was his, what else would crunchy Bend drivers drive? Of course, in a small town like Bend, that was entirely out of the question. It's still too small a town to be leaving BJ offers on cars.

"How would you like to pay today?"

I had to refocus after Ian, the juicy sales guy, disrupted my horny thoughts. It looked like Daddy's black Amex was about to lose the dust it was collecting. Not my fault daddy gave me one with my name on it. I pulled it from my LV wallet and handed it to sexy Ian. I felt his ire as he looked from the Louis Vuitton wallet and then to the Amex, undoubtedly for the first time in his life.

"I guess that'll work for your *$800* bike," he said sarcastically.

Wow! That was bitchy, I guess we know who won't be getting free head tonight.

Maybe I should have purchased the $2,500 bike he had suggested. I bet he'd spread his tight ass for that sale. My future piece of ass finished ringing up the order. He got nicer too. Perhaps he realized that a stud with a black Amex might provide a better meal than his usual Whole Foods vegan burrito. In hindsight, I should've bought the Hollings stud the more expensive bike for another reason too. Not only would Ian be happy, but Caleb might be wanting to show his appreciation too.

"Come in anytime and I'll set you up with a good bike for yourself," a sweeter Ian chimed.

"Maybe you can show me some good trails?" I asked.

"Maybe," he said with a smirk on his face. I headed out to the truck where I found the bike already loaded and strapped for my trip up to Madras.

I was nervous as I took the last turn off the highway heading into Madras. Having to face Mr. Hollings was not on my list of pleasurable events. I took a quick cut-off that I knew would get me to the Hollings farm faster. What was I going to say to him today? He didn't exactly seem like the small talk type.

"Uh geesh, Mr. Hollings, I was in the neighborhood, and I bought your smoking hot jailbait son a new bike. I felt so bad running him off the road and all. Ya think he might be able to come out and let me blow him?" I chuckled at my sleazy musings.

Even though I was driving in from the opposite direction, I recognized the Hollings farm and turned left into the dusty gravel road leading to the farmhouse. The driveway was tree lined and about 300 yards in length. I noticed a huge green John Deere tractor just off to my left. It was turning the field over for what I guessed was the second time that year. Like most farms around Madras, the Hollings place grew Timothy Hay, a good quality feed hay. Timothy Hay is high in fiber and is easier for livestock to digest. It tends to be more expensive than regular hay but is also higher in nutrients, making it a good crop to grow financially.

Glancing around as I drove in, I noticed three horses lazily grazing in the distance, but didn't see livestock on the farm. I knew they had hundreds of acres so perhaps they kept the livestock away from the house. That would certainly control the odors. I imagined the hay must be how the Hollings family made a living. My limited farming knowledge had led me to understand that most fields around here can get two, maybe even three cuts a season with Timothy Hay.

Wow Junior! You've started to pick up the local crop talk, farm bullshit, haven't ya?

I'd been in the Bend/Madras areas for the past three years and meeting the locals had helped me learn more about these humble people. My eyes were suddenly drawn to the field on my left where I noticed the big tractor had come to a halt.

"This don't look good," I mumbled, a bit alarmed. It looked like me and old man Hollings would get right down to it. I put the truck in park, cleared my throat and rehearsed my story. My armpits felt a little damp, dreading the encounter. I stepped out of the truck cab and reluctantly glanced over at the tractor that was now idle in the field. The green monster was huge with rear ties at a minimum, six feet tall. Old man Hollings was taller and more muscular than I remembered, but even he looked small next to the tractor, not even a football field length away. He was walking through the loose dirt, headed in my direction. A few dozen birds enjoying the insects and worms he had tilled over, scattered as he walked, closing in on me. *What the… That's*

not old man Hollings.

My focus became clearer as the stud got closer. Looked like Hollings retained hired help, and I was sure I needed a giant helping of this approaching morsel. The day just got a whole lot better. The hunk had on a pair of faded and well-worn Wranglers with a tattered old tee shirt barely clinging to his muscles. His bulging pecs were trying to fight their way out. He'd managed to wear out the front of his Wranglers in all the right spots. A large, bulging faded area below his belt buckle was all I needed to see to get excited. I imagined releasing the dragon within. A sweaty baseball cap on backward and a mess of blonde hair hanging over his eyes, finished the stunning package. He was striding athletically toward me like some rodeo dude or a commercial for Abercrombie and Fitch's country stud, fuck-a-the-week, centerfold edition.

"Holy shit, this piece of meat is smoking hot!" I may have said that out loud. *What do they feed the help around these parts?* The hunk was possibly the hottest man I'd laid eyes on in months.

My meal got within ten feet or so and extended his hand. He removed his sexy Marlboro man sunglasses and smiled pleasantly.

"Hello Mr. Alexander. What brings you to the farm?"

"Caleb… is that really you?" I barely managed to get nis name out.

CHAPTER FIVE: Joey

Eight Years Ago

"I miss my mom and dad, Caleb. They've been gone for three years, and I don't think they're coming back to get me," I said. I leaned against the wooden walls of our treehouse, tears forming in my eyes. He looked at me with his beautiful blue eyes, his lips pursed in sadness. He slid across the wooden floor of our fort and wrapped his arms around my neck.

"They'll be back, Joey. I bet they're just somewhere super far away, but they know you're safe and happy here with your grands. They'll be back; I'm sure of it," he said, in his high, sweet ten-year-old voice.

We were in our private tree house that Mr. Hollings had helped us build earlier in the summer. By helped, I meant he built it entirely while we had design veto. It was in Big Red, which was the nickname for the Ponderosa Pine that grew in Central Oregon. Caleb and I thought we were extremely high off the ground but as it turned out, Mr. Hollings had kept us at a safe eight feet high. I guess he figured at that height, we could survive a fall if we rolled out. This was our secret fort where all our planning and worldly decisions took place. I felt comforted by my angel boy as he stayed by my side while I cried.

"You're my absolute best friend, Caleb. I mean it too and that's in the whole wide world."

Being ten years old had made me an expert on things like best friends. It had been three years since I'd come to live next door to the Hollings farm. Spotting Caleb standing across the road that first day is still in my mind, like my favorite movie. I'd spent my first seven years living on the Indian reservation where all six generations of Joseph Crows had been born. The school I joined was a reservation school, attended only by tribal children, so seeing a white boy with blonde hair and blue eyes had been quite an event for me. I rushed into the house, full of amazing news for gram. She was at her usual post in the

kitchen as I burst through the screen door off the patio.

"Gram! I saw an angel across from the mailbox, just now!" I said, barely catching my breath.

"That's nice, honey. Did the angel see you too?"

"Gram," I whined. "I'm serious about this. He's a little boy like me, but he looks like an angel, and he lives across the road. And yes, he did see me, and he waved a lot, trying to make sure I saw him too," I babbled.

"That's good, baby, he sounds amazing. Did your grandpa see him too?" she asked, half doubting my story. She continued snapping some peas from her garden, tossing the crisp vegetables into a bowl for rinsing. *I sure hoped we wouldn't be eating those later.* I sensed that gram was just going along with me and I doubted she believed my news. I turned my head quickly when I heard the screen door slam shut, and grandpa came in from the yard carrying the mail.

"Tell her grandpa, tell gram all about the angel boy across the road, and be sure to tell her that I did not go on the road either." I dragged my grandpa by the hand and pulled him into the kitchen.

"Yes indeed, Sylvie, Joey did see an angel boy. He was across the road, down at the mailbox. He looks an awful lot like the Hollings boy, but I suppose with the sun shining on his blonde hair, he did sort of look like an angel," grandpa testified, "and Joey listened to me and stayed off the road, just like he said." Grandpa tousled my hair, happy to have supported my story.

"See Gram, I told you so." I placed my hands on my hips and presented her with a serious look, and then smiled at my grandpa to thank him for testifying on my behalf.

"Oh, and Sylvie honey, Joey may have met himself his *very own* angel." Grandpa winked at me and smiled, confirming the vision he had at the mailbox, while gram raised one eyebrow in amusement.

"Well, is that so?" She returned his smile with a knowing glint in her eyes.

CHAPTER SIX: Caleb

It was another typically hot and dusty afternoon in late June. I was plowing the field nearest to our house. The first hay of the season had been cut, bailed, collected, and stored in one of our massive barns. My chest and arms were bulging from the workout, and I was sore, but I liked the way my body was looking. I knew Joey loved my huge muscles and he enjoyed running his hands over them at night. I'd plowed the field under for the second plant and was sitting inside the idling tractor, the air-conditioned cab keeping me cool. My exhausted mind was on Joey and how we'd reconnected finally. I was so happy and relieved. I'd spent the better part of a week convinced he'd moved on.

After my mother had me ice it and take two days of rest, the injured ankle healed quickly, allowing me to try to visit Joey. The three-mile walk down was the easy part, the same return distance, however, was difficult in ninety-degree heat. I was on constant alert, checking for oncoming traffic while on the narrow side of the road, at the same time trying to avoid slipping off the edges. Falling was a real possibility because the canyon's surface was dry and dusty with loose debris everywhere. The red dirt looked like what I assumed the surface of Mars would resemble.

Unfortunately, after all the effort, Joey hadn't been there, so I took a quick dip in the river to cool off. Dejected, I endured the hike back up the hill, one more lonely time.

Yesterday was the second trip to the rock, and Joey, once again, wasn't around, so I wandered over to the marina to see if he was working. The marina at the Cove Palisades Park was north of the public park and boat launch. There was a winding road that cut off from the main road into the park and then over a hill to access the marina. It was nothing fancy and showed its wear from years of use and neglect. There were five connected floating docks that people used to tie off at when not on the river. The tourists that stayed in the three available cabins overlooking the river and marina usually kept their boats docked there as well. Several houseboats were maintained there for summer rentals and quite a few local

boats were docked for the summer months.

The rundown shack where the guys hung out didn't look busy. No tourists at the pumps, no Joey either. Mike Gaylord, one of Joey's buddies that tended the marina and pumped gas, was sitting on an upside-down bucket, gawking at me as I approached. Mike was a miserable person. One of those scrappy and skinny guys with a perpetual scowl on his face. He'd had a front tooth knocked out when we were in ninth grade and was yet to have it replaced. It added one more thing that folks could give him grief about. Mike was incessantly teased about his last name, Gaylord, so I figured he'd cultivated a thick skin from the barrage of insults his entire school life.

"Hey Mike, have you seen Crow?" I asked. Most guys that knew Joey called him by his last name, Crow. Mike spat chew out the side of his mouth and wiped it with the back of his filthy hand. He opted to scratch at his crotch for extra effect.

"He had to take a trip into town for the boss. I'm sure he'll be heartbroken he missed you though, pretty boy," he said menacingly. He was slouched forward letting a spit wad slowly drip from his mouth. "I'll be sure to tell him his girlfriend stopped by."

One or two of Joey's co-workers had always given me the evil eye when I was around. They didn't like or understand our connection. What did Crow get out of hanging around a church-going farm boy? They liked calling me Mr. Clean and Choir Boy. The guys that worked with Joey were afraid of him, and if he'd been there with me, he would've set Mike straight in about three seconds. They knew he didn't take well to anyone being mean to me.

"Ok, thanks," I mumbled and turned to head back home. My heart ached at missing Joey again. I was worried he didn't like me anymore and was having trouble eating and sleeping, wondering what I'd done. It wasn't like Joey and I to be apart for any amount of time. We'd always promised we'd be there for each other forever. I missed him so much it hurt.

I dreaded the walk back up the hill. It was at least ninety-five degrees now, and I was still limping slightly and bone-tired from a grueling week of tossing hay bales. I headed across the parking lot to start my trek when a beat-up Ford pickup circled back. The Junker pulled up alongside me and came to a stop. I recognized the faded Cove Palisades Marina logo on the door. The lone occupant was Joey, returning from whatever errand he'd been on for the boss.

"Hey, Caleb. I heard you broke your leg or something last week. One of the dipshit guys said he saw you getting helped out of a ravine by some snazzy dude in a BMW," he said, acting not concerned. "Where's the bum leg? You look normal as shit to me," he added, furthering my fear that he'd moved on from me after just a week. I should have known better than to think that he'd abandon me after what we meant to each other…

His distant manner was him being Crow, the stud athlete. I didn't witness this Joey often because he normally reserved it for his other friends. I disliked when he spoke to me this way.

"I'm fine. It was just a sprain. Mom made me ice it, no biggy." I stared at the hot asphalt sizzling under my shoes as I updated him. So, you heard I had a broken leg, and you couldn't be bothered to stop by to check up on me?

Joey sensed I was deflated and hot from the long walk down and had zero fight in me to debate the leg issue.

"Hey, hop in. I'll take ya home, handsome." There he was, my Joey. Hard to be disappointed with that version.

We rode quietly a bit with the windows open, trying to catch a breeze in the oppressive heat. Finally, he broke the silence while fidgeting with the radio knob trying to catch a signal down in the canyon. With us at least six hundred feet below the plateau, reception wasn't good when you were heading up or down, and even worse at the bottom.

"I'm sorry I haven't been by this past week," he began, softly. "I've been feeling a bit ashamed and embarrassed about… well, you know." He continued fiddling with the knob, trying to find reception, avoiding eye contact. "I never shoulda pulled that shit on you, acting all touchy-feely and spilling my guts like that. I'm so pissed at myself." He gave up on finding reception and sat back. "I'm worried as shit that I hurt you and our friendship. Have I?" He turned his sad eyes to me, trying to gauge my reaction.

"No, of course not. I'm not mad… or hurt at all," I lied, attempting to act nonplussed. "I liked what you talked about." Truthfully, I was hurting; it had been a tough week for me.

I worried myself sick that it was me who had caused the problems. My heart hurt so bad thinking about the possibility of losing Joey as my

best friend. I didn't care what names he used to describe us; I just knew I needed him. I lowered my voice for some weird reason, even though we were alone in the truck.

"I liked what we did," I admitted, afraid to look at his face. "I always think about that stuff too." His eyes widened when I added the last part. "But… I didn't like the part where you said that maybe we shouldn't do some of the stuff we do." I cleared my throat, trying to release the steel trap that had my throat on lockdown. I turned and looked over the canyon. I could feel my eyes welling up but turned back to him anyway.

"Joey, I really missed you this week. I thought we promised we wouldn't go days without hanging out. That's what you said. It hurt me when you didn't come over this past week. It hurts… bad, right here." I placed a hand to my heart, my throat constricted as my voice started choking up. There were so many things I had practiced saying to help explain why I was confused, but now that he was right by my side, it was difficult to start.

Joey was the worldly one in our friendship, and I felt unprepared to express my feelings about what we had been doing lately. I knew I liked it but was unsure of what exactly that meant. I was filled with angst the entire week about what had transpired and what it meant for us going forward. I couldn't lose him. I wouldn't survive the pain, I knew that.

"I know I'm naïve about stuff sometimes, and I'm not smart about certain things, but mostly, it's that I'm not good at explaining things I want to tell you. I depend on you for that, Joey." My hands were buried in my lap and my knees were jittery. "I'm sorry I don't know stuff. I'm not cool like you, and I get confused by you sometimes." I was devastated, and my frustration had finally reached its peak. My eyes welled up and I choked out a sob. My reaction wasn't unexpected because whenever I got emotional, my throat closes, and I have no outlet except tears. The first tears exploded from my eyes, and I quickly wrenched over at the waist, trying to hide them. My head came down hard on the dashboard, just as a big sob escaped. All the hurt and worry I'd been feeling shattered forth.

Joey had a startled reaction to my sudden smacking of my head on the console. I sensed his concern when he placed a hand on my back, still driving, but rubbing it gently. He found a pullout off the road, where he put the truck in park. He scanned the area to make sure of traffic or if we were in view of people enjoying the waterfall overlook. The falls still had water in them in early summer, but it wouldn't be long before they dried up. Many of the tourists found this pullout to be the best place for taking

pictures. Fortunately, he'd pulled over and into an area that had a slight downhill grade and was far enough off the road that it would be hard to see us in the company truck. He unbuckled and slid across the bench seat, pulling me into his arms.

"Hey, hey, Angel, its ok. I'm sorry. I'm such a fuckwad." He put my head on his and whispered in my ear, "I should know better than to say the things I did and then run off and disappear for a week. You're not hard inside like me and you don't worry all the time about being alone like I do. I've been a real shit." He held me quietly as I wept. "I was just afraid, Angel, you know me… I ran. I've been a real shit. You know I'd never hurt you on purpose, you know that dontcha?"

I felt myself relax in his embrace, but my pain continued to seep out of my eyes. He moved his face lower on my neck and I felt his breath on my skin. After a few seconds, he pulled his face away from my neck and reached out his hand, lifting my chin up to face him. He used the back of two fingers to wipe my tear-stained cheeks. Our faces were within inches of each other as he held my gaze, studying my face, trying to read something, anything that might tell him what he should do next. He drew closer, hesitant at first, and then little by little inched closer until his nose touched mine. I automatically closed my eyes, not sure what was happening. It was gentle at first as he rested his lips against mine. They trembled, and his breath caught, as he realized what he'd done. Not one to back out, he held my face and proceeded to give me a lesson in kissing.

You knew how to do this, and you waited until now to show me? *Overwhelming thoughts exploded in my head. Joey was kissing me. I was being kissed for the first time in my life and by the person I loved more than anything. I'd never thought it possible that I'd be able to feel this joy with him. His tongue started out soft and timid, and then he began to explore my mouth eagerly. I waited, hoping I would know how to follow his lead. At first, he fought to contain himself, a battle in his mind, while at the same time giving himself over to his feelings. I felt the constraint of his tense body against mine; he was stiff and nervous, but his mouth continued to devour mine. He pulled his soft lips an inch away, remaining close enough that I could feel his breath. I opened my eyes wondering why he'd stopped, and he looked lovingly into my eyes.*

"Is this ok? Can I do this?" he asked fear, inscribed on his face.

I nodded my head, giving absolute permission.

His eyes held mine. "I'm crazy about you. I love you, you dimwit,

can't you see that?"

I didn't know what to say, but it hadn't mattered because he pressed his lips back on mine and I relaxed, letting him take the lead. His mouth moved over mine and I lifted my hands to the side of his face to hold him even closer. The tender expression of his intimacy was flooding my heart with emotions I hadn't thought possible. Kissing him felt so personal, so warm, my heart swelled from his affection. I knew from that moment on our love was going to be different, fuller and more complete. I was floating in a winding river of emotions, and I would have been fine drowning in his arms.

My musings were interrupted by a truck coming up the driveway, alongside the field the tractor was idling in, bringing me back from the memory of my first kiss. The name Landon Alexander was typed in bold lettering under a rising sun and house logo. My father wasn't going to be happy about a visit from an Alexander. I had overheard my father on the phone talking with a Mr. Alexander a couple of times over the past several months. After another call last week, I'd asked him who he was. He'd told me that he was a big-time developer and the Alexander I had come home with was his son. My father had been polite but firm when he told Mr. Alexander he had no interest in talking water rights or selling any of our land so he could ruin the countryside with his million-dollar homes.

I opened the cab door on the giant green tractor. The air-conditioned breeze swept out as I jumped down. An unrecognizable man headed my way. He didn't look old enough to be Mr. Alexander Sr. I figured it must be Landon, so I headed over to intercept him and was immediately reminded of how handsome he was. He looked more like a local than I'd imagined possible for him. He was slim yet athletic like I'd remembered, wearing a polo shirt with tight golf slacks. The outfit was tasteful but casual and nothing like the rich vacation look I was met with last week.

"Mr. Alexander?" I asked, from about twenty feet away.

He looked surprised when he recognized me. I got to within ten feet and removed my sunglasses exactly when he removed his own fancy shades.

"Caleb… is that really you?" he asked. His eyes scanned me from head to toe, pausing briefly at areas of interest.

“Yes sir, nice to see you again. Are you here to see my father? Because he isn’t here. He went into town to pick up some seed.”

He was oblivious to what I’d said. “Caleb, you’re, um… you’re... so big. Wow, kid. I had no idea that was you on the tractor. Your legs, I mean your ankle, is it all better, are you healed?”

He looked me up and down again, pausing and then quickly averting his eyes from my privates, and back to the injured ankle. He seemed flustered when I caught his leering gaze.

“So, you work here driving those big tractors and stuff? I mean, how old did you say you were?” It was enjoyable watching him fall over himself, trying to make full sentences.

“Eighteen, sir.”

“Hey,” he began again, smiling politely at me. “Can you please not call me sir, you’re making me feel old and I’m not old enough to be a sir to a handsome man like you.” *He called me a man.*

“Your dad’s not here, huh?” he asked, nervously looking around, diverting his eyes to the fields and then back to me. “Any idea when he might return?” I enjoyed watching him fumble, avoiding direct eye contact.

“No sir, he didn’t tell me, but I’d bet he’ll be home shortly. Would you like to wait? I can grab us some iced tea, I’m pretty thirsty with all this heat.” I placed my hand around my neck in a choking motion to indicate my thirst and gestured for him to follow me. “Come on sir, let’s find us some shade and I’ll grab that tea.”

I sensed that Landon had figured out by now that I’d probably not stop calling him sir. He seemed resigned to it. When I came out to the big porch, I spotted him in our front yard. My father wouldn’t be happy to come home and see him relaxing against our tree. I walked over, thinking about how he’d helped me. He wasn’t as in control as he was that day. Maybe being on my turf had disarmed him? I noticed he wasn’t looking at me as some kid he’d rescued. His look was hungrier, and it was clear he liked what he saw. I wondered if he liked guys too, because he looked at me the same way Joey did. I was ashamed to admit it, but I kinda liked the attention.

I strode over and handed him a glass of my mother’s iced tea.

Lots of ice, with a large lemon wedge in a big Mason jar. I glanced back to find my mother standing just behind the screen door, her shadow outlining through the screen. She looked eerily like a ghost.

Earlier in the kitchen as she prepared our iced teas, she'd asked, "Why is an Alexander employee here, son?"

"It's the man that rescued me when I went off the road, Ma." It was clear she'd hoped my father didn't come home any time soon.

"I think it best that you make the visit short." She handed me the two jars of iced tea and wiped her hands on her apron, then nodded her head toward the yard, a gentle reminder to go and hurry things along, obviously concerned about my father's imminent return.

Landon took a long drink and pulled the bottom of his shirt up to wipe his lips. It seemed to me like an attempt to remind me that he too had a fit body.

"It definitely seems like you've got this farm stuff down."

"Yes, sir. I've been driving farm equipment since I was thirteen. Once I'd grown tall enough to reach the pedals, my father had me driving all the equipment," I said proudly.

"Well, you've certainly grown into a fucking hunk… I mean big guy." Landon purposely tripped on his words.

"Sir? May I ask why you're here today?" I said, trying to get his visit moving along. "I came away from your last visit feeling like my father wouldn't take kindly to another one. And sir, I'm sorry for that." I felt weird talking to an adult like that. "My father informed me after your last visit that you and your father are wanting to buy some of our land. He doesn't seem inclined to the idea." I swallowed hard and kept my voice level, trying hard to be respectful. "I don't know you well, sir, and I do appreciate how you helped me last week, but I think it best if you're gone before he gets home."

Landon was leaning against the giant tree, gazing back at me with an alarmed look on his face.

"Like I said, I like you, sir, and I can't say I'm proud of how my father acted after you so kindly helped me, but it's my butt he'll be whipping if you don't have a good reason for being here."

The shocked expression on his face said all I needed to know. He looked at me, confused as to what had happened to the shy kid last week, and wondering who the imposter was, standing in front of him. “Uh… yeah sure… ok. I’d hoped maybe… that at least you’d be happy to see me,” he smiled sheepishly. I held his gaze while he became unnerved by it. “Anyway, I brought something for you and it’s in the bed of my truck,” he said, motioning for me to follow him. He certainly was a handsome man, assured and confident in his mannerisms. I also noticed he had a nice round butt in his golf slacks. I felt my self-control crumbling as I walked behind him. He had the same lean muscled and sculpted butt that Joey had. *Let it go Caleb, you need him gone before your father returns.*

Landon leaned over the truck bed’s edge and motioned for me to have a look. Leaning in, I saw an expensive trail bike with big knobby tires and extra-large shock absorbers. Obviously, a high-dollar trail bike.

“That’s nice, sir. I never figured you for a bike rider. New?” I questioned. He was still leaning against the truck, muscles bulging in his pale blue polo shirt, grinning at me.

“It’s yours, a gift from me and my dad. We know your bike got ruined, so we bought it for you.” I stared at the pricey bike and then back at him. “So… what ya think?” he asked, with a fake smile fixed on his face, almost like he believed the lie himself. I knew this had something to do with him and his dad trying to curry favor with my father. I cleared my throat and backed away from the truck, deducing that politeness was the best strategy.

“Thank you kindly, sir, but I can’t accept a gift like that from you or your father. I appreciate your thoughtfulness, but you did enough with the terrific care you gave me. If anything, I owe you.”

I’ve never seen a tan face go white so quickly. Was it shock or disbelief that I’d turned down such an extravagant gift? As he lowered his hands from the edge of the truck bed and brought them to his side, I detected an ugly change in his face.

“Caleb, I need you to take that bike. My old man insisted I drop it off.” His voice had a meanness to it. “People have been saying I ran you off the road, and he’s pissed off in a major way.” He glanced around to see if anyone, maybe my mom, could hear him, and his jaw

tightened. “I can’t leave here with that bike and then explain to my dad that you wouldn’t accept it. I’m not delivering that news to him.”

Wow! He is afraid of his father. Just like me.

He took a step toward me and gritted his teeth. “So take the damn bike, already.”

I coolly returned his glare. “No, sir. I’m not going to do that. Surely if your father is unreasonable about hearing bad news, then you can imagine how my father would take it if he saw me on a new bike, one purchased by your father.” I took a measured breath and took a step forward; I was bigger than him. “I purchased my old bike secondhand for ten bucks, money I worked hard for. I fixed it up myself. You expect me to ride that fancy new bike around this farm in front of my parents, and explain to them that your father bought it for me? That isn’t going to happen, sir.”

I’d never addressed an adult this way in my life. My father would tan my hide if he’d heard this conversation. But, then again, maybe not. It was an Alexander I was addressing after all. Landon appeared defeated as I held my nerve. It wouldn’t be me getting a switch to my backside later and I highly doubted that Landon’s dad delivered corporal punishment like mine did. He placed a hand back to the side of his truck and pursed his lips, turned left and right, and then leaned into me, whispering. “I’ll suck your dick, kid.”

He leered at me with the wickedest look I’d ever seen. *Had I heard him correctly?* My face caught fire. “What did you…” I was interrupted by the one thing I’d wished to avoid that afternoon.

I heard my father’s truck and saw the dust cloud rising from the driveway. He rolled up to the house and then the engine went silent. Frozen in place, I watched as my father took a deep breath before he reached for the door handle and got out. He stood there for a moment, an angry look inching across his face, resembling a storm moving across a darkened sky as he stared at the Alexander logo flashing in the sun on the side of lucky number thirteen.

He walked directly toward Landon. I shot a glance at Junior, my eyeballs motioning sideway to suggest he get inside his truck. The look was half desperation to save my own hide, and half to save his. I moved my eyes again, this time more aggressively, toward his truck, offering him the best route to get out safely.

“Mr. Alexander.” Father spoke the words firmly and coolly, obviously restraining a very unchristian thought of what he’d like to do. “What business do we have today?”

I stepped between the two men and said, “Mr. Alexander is just leaving, sir.”

Landon, unfazed by my father’s anger, reached for his truck door before stopping and turning to catch my attention. “My offer still stands kid, lemme know, will ya?”

He tipped his head toward my father and got in. After watching him drive down our drive to the main road, I smiled weakly at my father, and turned and walked back to the John Deere. Had I heard Landon correctly? Maybe he wasn’t the nice man I’d thought him to be.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Landon

"What the fuck was that?" I murmured, glancing in my rearview mirror. I'd just left the Hollings farm, confused as fuck. Who the hell was that and what happened to the kid on the side of the road, impressed by my expensive SUV? I'd gotten hit by a big stick and that stick was Caleb Hollings. *Fuck me royally!*

The hunk had jumped off the tractor and strode across the field, kicking up dust from his boots like something out of a western porno. At first, I thought he was hired help for the farm. *Boy, I was wrong.* It was the Hollings boy, wearing Wranglers like a second skin, and he'd worn out the front of those jeans with an obvious full slab of beef inside. Sign me the fuck up, I was all in and ready to hitch my wagon to that cowboy.

"Holy shit! Who was that fucking stud?" I said out loud, even though I was alone in the pickup. I was still in shock, mumbling incoherently as I fully absorbed what I'd just witnessed. Some hick town, eighteen-year-old, had caused me to lose my shit. Don't get me wrong, the kid I rescued a week ago was cute for sure. He had the body of a Greek God. The sight of his chest, after he dropped his overalls for me… let's just say, I couldn't get that vision out of my head and had jerked off a few times this past week over that fantasy. The Hollings boy was fine! *Fine as hen's teeth.* I cracked myself up over my own witty farm banter. But the hunk I'd just left, he was no boy. Caleb was a grown ass man on full display; a pretty man, no doubt, but all man just the same. Flawless skin, perfect white teeth, hiding behind lips so soft and buttery, I could acquire cholesterol problems just thinking about kissing them. Hunky Hollings was a man. A big sexy hunk of pleasure. The kid oozed sex appeal and had no clue he possessed what every gay man desired. All that sexiness, and yet he retained one of the most respectful, polite, *aw shucks* kind of man/boy personalities to match. The boy in him was fading fast and I wanted to be there for the final incarnation. That was all man, and he was wrapped up in one delicious package. A package I intended to unwrap, with my teeth!

That wasn't the normal reaction I had to an attractive guy. Sure, I admired a hot guy, I enjoyed looking at them, but I never lost my shit about it. That hunk was fucking hot and just country enough to not have a clue about just how hot he was. *Was he gay? Would he be into a guy like me?*

My mind was in overdrive. Caleb, the farm stud, might be a tougher project than normal. I was sure he wouldn't smoke a blunt with me and let me suck him off, so my most successful approach was out. I could also tell that he was a pure Christian soul. The gold cross around his neck provided additional support to that hypothesis. All that did, of course, was make him even more desirable to me. Suddenly, I had a softer thought cross my filthy mind, I began to see myself with him. *Why the fuck not?* I could guide him into a new lifestyle, away from the farm. Introduce him to my friends and show off that prime piece of beefcake.

"Yep, I can do that!" I smacked a hand down hard on the steering wheel and yelled, filling the cab with my madman musings. I had myself a new project and *'Yummy Farm Hunk'* was the title I'd use for the latest Alexander Development acquisition.

I'd recently outed myself to my folks. Hiding had become exhausting after all the matchmaking efforts my mom executed the past seven years since I'd turned twenty-one. Once mommy got excited about the possibility of a daughter-in-law and babies, she became unbearable. I decided to put a stop to gramma's hormones.

"Mom, Dad, I'm gay!" I blurted out over dinner, expecting mom to cry hysterically over this non-baby-having news. But she shocked the shit out of me and didn't skip a beat.

"Liv, my hairdresser, her son is a gay too," she chimed merrily, after what I'd figured would've been a major bomb dropped on her.

"Mom, you don't say a gay*, you just say gay," I told her, to educate her for the future ladies' luncheons she'd surely be gossiping at.*

I'd dated a few guys, and my usual approach to dating was to keep it light and noncommittal. Well, it would be a tad bit of a lie to admit to just a few. Most of them were during college at the University of Oregon, home of the Ducks. After pledging to my fraternity, I moved into a house

full of hot dudes. There were so many other frat houses, ready to fill and refill our house, come party time. Those guys were usually hot, and it was definitely a requirement to be the hottest of the hot if you pledged with our house. And nowadays, with everyone so chill about being gay, and with all the 'love is love' attitudes, it was easy to be both out and a frat brother. The hot drunk frat dudes were fit and muscular and we all walked around the house butt naked, schlongs flopping around, making it a virtual smorgasbord of cock. But frat partiers and college life was not about building a life with someone. Of course, I partook in the drunk frat boy smorgasbord of cock, and well, I'd had my share. Honestly, I'd probably had more than my share, considering I was a greedy cock sucker.

I was lonely in Bend. My life was empty of love and empty of prospects. Because I was lonely and bored, I was picking up guys and being irresponsible. Recently though, I'd been thinking about love, real love shared with another man as we built our lives together. All the guys at my dad's business were either rednecks or so straight that the thought of being gay scared the hell out of them, so I didn't look there. I had enough problems being the owner's kid, I sure as hell didn't need to come out as the owner's gay kid.

I had one close friend in Bend, Ronnie. We shared all our conquest stories and generously gave advice about each other's love lives as we burned through them. Ronnie was short for Veronica. We met at Starbucks when she flirted with me. We'd argued over the Duck's defense versus Stanford's offense. Ronnie, the Stanford educated engineer, had a true love for college football. She was pretty and petite with a smoking hot body and a personality to match.

We planned our first lunch date the very day we met. As soon as Ronnie got the 411 on me and vice versa, we became fast friends. She was always on the lookout for hot guys for herself and made sure to scope some for me too.

"Hey Lannie, dear, I gave a hot single guy from the office your phone number. You're going to love 'insert name here,'" she'd say. Her auditioning guys would call, we'd meet, and if they were hot, we'd fuck too. After three long years of this, I was lonely, and wanted love. I had love to offer, so why not me?

I called her as I was heading out of Madras, returning with bike to Bend. I got her voice mail. "Ronnie! It's me. I met *theeeee* hottest guy on the planet. Call me back, we have *got* to meet up." I hung up, satisfied about my next conquest plan.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Joey

If I spent even one more second staring at the ceiling, I was gonna off myself. I'd hoped that I'd patched things up with Caleb with the kiss, but now, lying in bed, I thought about why I'd acted like a major pussy and avoided him all week to begin with. The fact that I'd gotten all weird and pushed myself on him at the rock had me confused. Had I been worried that Caleb was eighteen and might wise up and find a better guy than me? I doubted it could be true because I wasn't even sure he wanted to be in a relationship with a guy. So far, I'd figured we were just bros being bros. But I also had a lot of bros, and we weren't doing the same stuff with each other. Caleb and I had something entirely different. Then there was the fact we were both eighteen, we weren't boys anymore. This new shit I was feeling was different somehow. Was I testing him to see if his affectionate ways would lead us to something more physical? I started offering it up because I was curious if he'd take the bait. I'd also reached the critically impatient stage of needing to act on something even if it meant labeling myself gay. I was tired of lying to myself about what I was feeling for him and what I hoped we were to each other. The strange emotions had been coming to the surface more and more since we were sixteen. I was an idiot to have forgotten that Caleb didn't operate that way. The fact that I assumed he would just go for it and jump my bones was foolish on my part. He wasn't capable of shit like that, not to mention, he wasn't the kind of person to be jumping anyone's bones. He was inexperienced; he wasn't immature, it's just that he'd been sheltered by seriously Christian parents. His inexperience was related to matters of the heart, relationships and the physical aspects. Hell, I don't think I've ever heard Caleb even say the word sex, let alone understand what it meant. He had no computer, no cell phone, no dirty porn mags, and zero access to any kind of sexual information, other than my shitty, half-assed attempts. His dad sure the fuck hadn't given him *the talk*. I knew his uptight dad well, and with the whole church thing, I was sure he'd advised him to *"wait 'til you're married son, you'll figure it out."*

He was also clueless about what an incredible catch he was. He

was so damn bashful to start with and modest to a fault. We'd seen everything there was to see in each other's bodies, but still, it had taken him many summers to get to where he'd strip down in front of me. I'd patiently watched him the past eleven years as he grew into this incredibly sexy guy, and as a man myself, coming into my own, my patience was running out.

Our relationship was unusual in many ways. I figured he liked dudes, more specifically me, and had zero problems behaving the way he did when he and I were together. Caleb simply asked when he needed me to hold him, and he didn't think it was unusual for two teenage guys to act like we did. If he wanted a hug, he took it. When I snuck over at night, he wanted us to touch and snuggle; the touching part had become more advanced as of late.

Both of us were high school guys, and he'd never thought it odd? *That makes us gay, right?* I'd just begun to think of us in those terms recently. He told me all the time that he loved me, and I believed him. But Caleb being Caleb, did he love me in the biblical sense or the best friend sense? I'd not been convinced that he understood how these actions applied to our future. But after seeing him at the marina parking lot, and driving him home yesterday, I was quite sure he knew what I wanted from him. That kiss should have cemented my intentions and put a label on what we were.

I slid across the seat to console him and had him in my arms as fast as I could. We'd melted into each other like we'd found our rightful place. I knew I wanted to kiss him. I'd never found the courage to be that intimate because kissing was the ultimate show of what I wanted with him. I also knew that it would've been his first kiss. I'd kissed a few girls, here and there, mostly to make it look good to the guys I hung out with. Chicks were sweet, soft and smelled nice and I'd enjoyed it, but kissing Caleb yesterday, whoa! That'd been different and was well beyond what I'd imagined it would be like.

Coming down on his mouth was intoxicating. After his initial surprise, he let himself relax and gave as good as he took. The willingness from his mouth came after he accepted what was happening and just slid into it. I felt the release of a lifetime come off my back, all the yearning and confusion just faded as soon as we were one—whole, fulfilled—and I knew in that moment that I wanted to show him that I loved him and needed him to be mine. This time the words were going to be different coming out of my mouth. I needed him to know that this love was a 'I want you as mine,' kind of love.

This bravado hadn't come suddenly on its own. The desires I had and my decision to finally admit what I wanted from him, after all these years, hadn't suddenly appeared when I kissed him. I can thank the wisest and bravest man I know, Joseph Flying Crow for getting me there. The man I share my name with, my grandpa.

After I sulked around all week after my disagreement with Joey, and came directly home after work every day, my grandparents became concerned. Most nights I stared at my dinner plate and pushed food around knowing I was too confused and sad to eat. After a few nights of this, gram had seen enough.

"Joey, where's your appetite, son?" She reached her hand out to touch my forehead. "You feel ok, love? I'm worried about you."

"I'm fine gram, just tired I guess."

I'd excused myself and gone to bed early every night. I felt awful and looked like death warmed over. One night, after grandpa dried the dishes that gram had washed, he came up the stairs to my room and tapped on my bedroom door.

"Joey, son, can I come in?" His voice sounded muffled through the door. I sat up in bed after acknowledging him and he came in. I was lying on the bed spread, too overwhelmed from missing Caleb to bother crawling under the covers. Still, I faked a yawn, so he'd think he woke me and maybe not give me as much shit. He rarely came into my bedroom unless he and I were going to have a 'Come to Jesus' meeting. In his case it was more of a 'Come to the Spirits' meeting.

My grandpa was a wise, grand, and proud Indian man. Scars from years of being kept down and walked over were etched on his wrinkled face. He was large in frame; gray weaved its way through long black hair, and we shared the same high cheek bones. In his time on the reservation, he'd overcome many challenges, seen many losses, and still had deep pride and a love of the spiritual world. He was a respected man by his people. I admired him and had so much love for him.

He stood wearily at the foot of my bed. "So, son, would you like to tell me what's going on with you?" he began. "You're clearly not yourself and your grams is worried. She senses her favorite person is hurting." He nodded toward my open bedroom door. "I just dragged my old, weary bones up those stairs, and you know I hate that! The boss sent me up kid,

and I need to tell her something when I get back down to her kitchen," he said, sounding both tired and aggravated at the entire situation.

"Tell her it's nothing grandpa, I'm ok." Even I knew that was a lie.

"So, you think gram and I were born yesterday, do ya?" he asked, a bit sterner. "Ok then, I'll make you a deal, I'll go first."

He leaned against my dresser and crossed his arms, gathering his thoughts while he looked around my bedroom. Focusing back on me, he said, "You've been moping around here for days, Joey, and you've been home for dinner every single night, not that you're eating much. What are you trying to do, hurt your gram's feelings about her cooking? Come on, Joey, even your chores are done on time without me having to ride your backside. You think gram and I are too old to notice?"

He frowned, looking disappointed, and took a step forward. Leaning over, he grabbed the footboard. He lowered his voice. "And Joey… you haven't snuck out of the house one night this week." He cocked his head, raised his brows and gave me a knowing grin.

"You know about that?" I asked, incredulously.

"Not only do I know about it, but I also know where you're at every night until five in the morning too," he said, a bit too clever for my taste.

"Awww gramps, it's not like that." I embarrassingly protested.

"Not like what, son? Not like you have a desire to be alongside the one you love?"

I felt like my ten-year-old self getting caught after being bad. They knew? What the hell? *I needed to hide under the covers after the big reveal. "Gramps, its, uhm…" I stuttered, trying to get my footing.* What the fuck was he saying? Oh shit! Is he really saying this out loud, right to my face? *My reddening face was giving my embarrassment away.*

"Now, son, listen and listen carefully. Your gram and I've known about you two boys since the day you saw the Hollings boy across Jones Road. You stood there looking at him like you'd seen an angel or something," he teased. "What were you boys, seven, maybe eight years old?" I nodded in agreement. "I understood that you wanted to be there, and he wanted to be here. You were imprinted at that very moment." He moved around the foot rail of my bed and sat on the edge of my mattress

as he continued. "In our culture, son, the great spirits look out for us. They choose our journey and who goes on that journey with us. We don't choose who we travel our path with during this life, I've told you that before. The spirit world made that choice for you, and if the Hollings boy is your path, then so be it." Grandpa raised his hands above his head in deference to the great spirits. "The spirits know best, and your gram and I've been waiting for you to come to this point in your spiritual journey. We believe that your spirit knows who's best for you and is helping you make such an important decision."

Grandpa paused and took a slow breath. His face was grave and serious-minded as he stretched his gnarled hand out for me to hold, eager for me to understand the significance of his next statement. "Don't ever let other people decide your path, Joey. Your gram and I expect more from you. Are you two young men going to have your obstacles? Of course you are. Are others going to try to get on your path and move you from it? Of course they are. But we Crows are not easily moved, and you, my pride, are a sixth-generation Crow; you will not be moved either. You and Caleb are adults now and you get to decide your paths, together."

The dim light on my nightstand glowed against my grandfather's face as he spoke to me, guiding me to make the decision that so heavily weighed on me. "And one more thing, your gram instructed me to make sure that you understand that all the spirit world's children are special, regardless of who they love, and she expects you to choose the path that's best for you. Caleb is your path, boy, so don't fight or agonize over this any longer." After grandpa finished, he stood, peering directly into my soul. "I love you, boy, and I'm proud of you. I am not your father, but I was your father's father, and I know that he's right with this too. Waste no more time, Joey." A tear slid down my face as he let my hand go and left the room.

CHAPTER NINE: Landon

The diners at the latest *in* restaurant in The Old Mill District in downtown Bend were a boisterous bunch of trendy hipsters.

"Ronnie, this place is great. Good choice."

"Right? I told you this neighborhood was getting hip, finally. I don't miss California as much seeing this. Let's hope the men stack up to the ambience."

The Old Mill District was the place to be in Bend. Located in the center of the city and nestled along the Deschutes River, the crowded streets had many dining choices, trendy pubs, and the usual eclectic retail outlets.

Veronica was looking available in a body-hugging tank and pencil skirt. Her legs were a mile long, ending in her latest pair of Jimmy Choo's. She had her hair up in a tight chignon to keep it off her neck, her best feature, she believed.

The weather was warm, so many of our fellow diners had their finest *barely there* clothing on as well. I was wearing tight slacks, a bit above bare ankles, and Prada loafers. A very tight baby blue Versace tee shirt clung to my chest and biceps.

"I love you in blue, it compliments your eyes, darling," Veronica said, reaching over to touch my expensive shirt.

Once we were seated, I shared every single detail of each moment I'd thus far spent with Caleb. "So… what do you think?" I asked, reaching for my gin and tonic, eagerly awaiting feedback.

"Oh, Lannie," she cooed, "he sounds like such a dear boy. But can we get serious here for a second? The kid is barely eighteen and you're a grown man for god sakes!" She waved the server over for a refill of her sparkling water. "You cannot think there's a romance

there, do you? What on earth would a worldly man like you do with a country bumpkin like him?" She acted like my news was tedious at best. "Seriously, honey, where are you going to take him? Are you just going to show up at our fave haunts with some child on your arm?" She had started to get a bit shrill at this point. "Look around here, honey, would wonder boy fit in here?" She waved her hands around as if she had recently been crowned Miss America. "No, of course he wouldn't. For starters, he is too young to drink, darling, a mere child really." When she was done giving me a reality check, she tapped the rim of her glass, pointing again to our server.

"Jesus, Ronnie! Hush for a second, girl. Take a breath and calm down, will ya?" I said, nervously looking around to see who may have overheard her soapbox sermon. She leaned forward, examining me. She, in all her glorious getup, freshly painted and faux gem studded nails, looked out of place as usual in this granola town. "I'm telling you Ron; this guy is not some immature kid. He practically runs his dad's farm, driving all those big tractors and shit," I offered, hoping for an inch.

"Oh, ok, so now the visual's starting to come to me." She took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. One would think that she'd just received an epiphany. "Big, dumb farm boy drives tractor. He's Tarzan, you're Jane, that sort of thing, darling?" She placed her elbows on the table with her hands under her chin. "Darling, by all means, wine and dine him. Oh wait, better yet, take him to Chuck E. Cheese, win him a prize, and then you can take him home and fuck him. Please… just get it out of your system already. For god's sake, Landon, he's eighteen frikken years old!" I hated Ronnie. Especially when she was right.

We finished dinner and were nibbling on a shared apple pie. "Your father still hasn't had those drawings delivered over to my office." She shifted gears, removing her bitchy crown and replacing it with her business cap. "Has he given you a timeline yet on the blueprints for the canals and water access he'll need for the Palisades project?" She paused to smile at a possible conquest at the bar. "I left a message with Trudy, his assistant, three days ago. Can you tell her I need those ASAP?" She was twirling her tiny fork in her hand, seductively ignoring yet flirting with the dude at the bar, about to take a bite of the pie. "By the way, my job is to assist your father, not her, so tell that bitch to back the fuck off when I call in."

Ronnie became a different woman with this switch in

conversation. Here was business mode, killer instinct, Veronica Davenport, lead engineer for the County of Deschutes, City of Bend, Oregon.

"There's been a snag, Ronnie, and my old man is pissed as wasps in a tornado. I hate to bring up farm boy again so soon, but his father is the snag. The guy won't lease, sell or give us any access to his land for water." I took a breath and the last bite of pie before continuing. "We'd like to purchase the 145-acre parcel of flat land he owns on the west side of his property. That batch of acreage leads directly to the cliff overlooking the cove, the perfect place for the view homes, but the guy won't budge. My old man has doubled his offer, but Mr. Hollings gives zero shits about million-dollar homes and private golf courses." I took a swallow of my cocktail. "Get this, Hollings said, 'I'd be happy to sell you some hay if you ever invest in some livestock.' My father was seriously pissed off." She snorted wine back into her glass hearing that. "You should have seen the death look my dad shot me when I laughed my ass off as he was telling the story at the shop." I glanced around to see who may be listening and leaned forward with a serious, fearful expression on my face. "My old man is seriously a scary fucker sometimes. He looked me square in the eye after I laughed at him and said, 'Laugh all you want Junior, I'll be getting that land. You can bet your sweet college-boy ass on that.'"

CHAPTER TEN: Caleb

Between long days of farm work and brief lunchbreaks at the rock for swims and meet ups with Joey, it was almost the start of our senior year; summer was ending. We were squeezing more time in at the rock because Joey's grands bought him a car for his senior year, and he'd shuttle me back and forth from the farm. The car was a used Honda Civic. He knew I wasn't impressed because of my passion for fancy German cars, but I made a big deal of the gift nonetheless. I told him how jealous I was of him and how much I liked the new rims he'd purchased from his savings. What I really liked though was him driving up the hill during his lunch break and bringing me down to the rock and back.

I'd jog the short distance from the farm over to the corner country store, located a quarter mile down from the farm to meet him. After an hour of play, he'd drop me back at the farm on time so my father couldn't complain about my work ethic. Even though I worked ten to twelve hours a day, he never seemed satisfied with my effort.

Despite the hard work and long hours, it had been an awesome summer for both of us. Ever since *the kiss,* as we liked to call it, Joey and I'd done some more exploring with each other's bodies. After three weeks of all the kissing we could handle, we both knew there was a 'next' step we wanted to take. He was being patient with me, but I could tell he was getting blue balls. I'd heard the term from his friends whose girlfriends didn't touch their privates. I decided I was going to try to give Joey some relief, release or whatever it took to prevent them.

Being a guy with a thing of my own, I'd figured I knew my way around one. I'd been masturbating plenty lately, maybe too much since Joey and I started kissing. He'd suggested I call it *thing* instead of my privates. He knew I was uncomfortable with words like dick and cock so, *thing*, it was.

Earlier that week at the river, Joey grabbed his thing to show me by

example.

"You could say 'touch my thing, Joey' or 'hey, Crow, I'm going to touch your thing,' he said, attempting to be serious so as not to freak me out. It still came out funny and we laughed at the sight of him giving me lessons while grabbing himself, over and over.

I wasn't freaked out, considering I was standing there watching him grab himself in front of me. It looked amusing to me. During some particularly heavy grinding of our sun-tanned skin on each other's bodies, we took turns lying on top each other, face to face, kissing and grinding ourselves into oblivion. Both of our things were hard as rocks as we rubbed them together. The sweat running off our steamy bodies acted as a natural lubricant, and we struggled to find that certain goal we were trying to get to. Our mouths connected as we grasped for each other's bodies, tugging and pulling at our penises. When I was on top of him, he reached back and grabbed my butt, pulling me hard into him and moaning softly as I ground on him. I often had the feeling that we weren't done, despite long periods of huffing and grinding. Every time I felt like I was going to explode, I'd slow down and wonder to myself why we didn't finish what we'd started. Joey would sometimes look up at me as I paused, his eyes begging, and I knew I had to figure something out, and real soon.

Joey met me at the local country store right on time. It was at the top of the hill before you entered the state park. The small store catered to the summer tourists, providing snacks, blowup floaties, and assorted beer. They also rented out watercraft such as pontoon boats and jet skis. As kids, we used to walk down with quarters we'd begged off our folks and would buy candy or a snack. We always tried to figure out how we could maximize our purchase, so we had more to share, always careful to buy what we both liked. If there were an unequal piece or bite left, Joey always insisted I have it.

I jumped into the passenger seat of the Honda, noticing that Joey had his favorite frayed jean shorts on. No shirt or belt, my eyes were drawn down to the strap of his boxers showing above the jean waist.

"You look… sexy," I whispered, a bit embarrassed, unsure of how I sounded. He grinned, rubbed his crotch and winked. His smooth lean legs and torso looked ultra-tanned against the pale faded jean shorts. Even while sitting at the steering wheel, his abs were tight and muscular.

There must be words, very dirty words to describe what I felt as I stared at him, but I didn't know them. I swallowed hard, thinking about him being all mine. He loved me, that's what he'd said.

"Football camp has been good for your body, Joey, you look amazing. How's your timing coming?"

"Thanks, handsome. Yeah, my mechanics are good, I'm getting fitter, and the arm feels great so far. I'm sore as fuck though." He rubbed his throwing arm, stretching it through the sunroof.

"You started last year, any reason you won't again this year?" I asked. He'd told me competition was tougher this year with him and Jaylen Ross both seeking to start.

"Ross wants it too. He's gotten stronger and the fucker grew two inches over summer, but yeah, I'm feeling good. I've got a good shot."

Small talk outta the way, I bravely decided to ask him about the past couple of weeks and whether he was satisfied with what we'd been doing at the rock. I needed to know and was eager to please him.

"Um, Joey, about when we're rolling all over each other and kissing? Can I ask you something? I hope you don't get mad about it."

He twisted in his seat as if he thought something bad was coming. "Sure, go ahead. Is it me? Am I doing something you don't like?"

"Oh, heck no, that's not it. I'm, well… I'm worried that maybe I'm not doing something right. Do you think I need to learn more stuff? I really want to make you feel good and I want you to like being with me." I quickly turned away, face catching fire, and stared down at the floorboard and then looked up. I was going to see this conversation through and be a man about it even if I found it embarrassing.

"Come on, Angel, of course I like being with you. You're my boyfriend, aren't ya?"

The statement caught me off guard. Joey had never called me his boyfriend. My face flushed again, and I lifted my head, turning back to him. "I am?" I asked softly.

“Well, of course you are!” He scrunched his face, concerned I’d not liked the idea. “You agree, dontcha? We’re boyfriends, right? You ok with that?” he half asked, half declared. I sat next to him, staring at his incredible body in awe at the thought of being his boyfriend.

“We’re together, like I’m yours, and you’re mine. You want that too, don’t you?” He stared at me, nervously tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, awaiting my response.

“I never thought we could call it that,” I admitted.

“We can call it whatever we want. I’m not ashamed of you and me. Fuck those people that don’t agree with us, and fuck what they might say too.” He was fired up, a bit of spit sprayed out of his mouth. “I’m on a journey, a path and such. I have dreams and I have chosen my person to join me on my path.” I wasn’t sure I understood what he meant but I knew it was important to him.

“What journey? You’re on a path? Am I on the path?” He began to smile. “You’ve lost me, Joey,” I said.

“Never mind, Angel, you’re my person, uh, I mean boyfriend. I was just referring to some stuff my grandpa spoke to me about, but we can save that for another time.” He sat up straight in his seat. “I love you, so that’s it, we’re boyfriends!” He pulled his baseball cap lower over his eyes and smirked. He concentrated on the road down to the marina while I grinned like a Cheshire cat, leaning back comfortably in the passenger seat.

That, I guessed, was that. We were boyfriends.

We drove a minute or two more while I let the whole boyfriend thing sink in. My heart felt too big for my chest now. I cracked a Coke I’d purchased at the local store and offered him a swig.

“Can I finish what I was asking about earlier? Now that I know I’m on a path and such, and… with my boyfriend.” I laughed, pretending to be offended that he’d waylaid my entire train of thought.

“You little shit!” He reached out to run his hand over my arm. “Yes, you can finish, weirdo. What’s got your pretty face so worked up today?”

I decided to be strong and just say it. “I wanna touch your thing!” I declared, matter of fact.

“What the…” He laughed out loud. “You want to touch my dick? Ok, what the fuck’s stopping you, stud? I wish you would touch *my thang,”* he added a throaty, country drawl. “That’ll save me the fucking time.” He was laughing so hard that Coke shot out of his nostrils.

“Joey! I’m serious. I want to do stuff to you,” I said, before lowering my voice. “I don’t know what though.” I was flushed and stammering. “Gosh, you must think I’m so dumb. Why would you want to be with me? Huh? I’m not sure where to start, and it’s important to me that you feel good, and I want you to touch me there too!” I ended the last line with conviction. Why were these things so hard to say? Embarrassed, I gazed out the window at the dry grass and parched cliffs.

I felt his hand touch mine as he slid it quietly over the console. He pulled the car into a parking spot. It got quiet after he turned off the ignition, the silence undermining my conviction. I was gently squeezing his offered hand as I watched a bunch of crows fighting over a discarded fast-food bag.

“Hey, come on, Angel, look at me.” He squeezed my hand tighter and smiled at me. “We’ll figure it out together… how about that?”

You couldn’t have wiped the grin off my face if you tried.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Joey

Eleven Years Ago

Aunt Teddy had lowered her voice to a whisper in the front room where she was with my grandparents. Everything got quiet every time my dad's name came up. The walls in the tiny bedroom of Aunt Teddy's single wide were extremely thin, so I had no problem hearing what was being discussed.

"Jack, would you mind stepping out for a while? Your foul language is not helping, and Joey is in the other room," Grandpa said, trying to remain calm.

"Fuck that, Joe! I'm part of this family and she's my wife," Aunt Teddys husband responded.

"If you don't leave, I'll be forced to call tribal police; they know why I'm here."

"Just leave Jack. We don't need another fucking thing to screw up my life," my aunt screamed.

The force of the front door being slammed by Uncle Jack rattled the cheap structure. Apparently he didn't appreciate being asked to leave by my grandpa. I heard him fire up his truck's engine and then the peeling of tires accompanied by some nasty words. I lie still on the thin mattress I slept on. It was the only thing in the room, and I'd pushed it into the corner; I felt safer having two walls to protect me.

"I intend to keep Joey on the reservation with us," my aunt said to grandpa. "It's what Joe would have wanted, and he's not leaving," she said.

"Teddy, I know you love your brother but you're not ready to raise his child," Gram said, as kindly as she could. "You've only been out for six weeks, honey. How are you going to focus on your recovery with Joey underfoot all the time?"

"Just because you two ran off and forgot about your roots is no reason for you to try to take Joey away from his people. Joey's dad wouldn't have allowed it, and you know it," she yelled.

It was true. My grandparents had left the reservation after the council had voted to accept the offer from Alexander Developers, but they still valued their Indian culture. Grandpa couldn't accept that a portion of his beloved land was going to be developed into a golf course with fancy homes for rich people. He and my daddy had fought hard against the tribal council approving the land grab, and their votes were what stood between approving the deal or resulting in a deadlock that would have prevented the sale. My dad's disappearance had been exactly what the developers needed to get their deal fixed.

"Listen, Teddy," Grandpa spoke calmly, "Joey is coming home with us and that's the end of it. You understand me? We have the court's approval, and we know you want what's best for that child."

After my parents had disappeared, I was alone. The grands tried to get me to live with them on their recently purchased farm, but my aunt had convinced them that daddy would want me raised on the reservation. It had been months since my folks disappeared and no one knew where they had gone. According to tribal council rules, a council member could be replaced if they missed three consecutive months of council meetings and that is exactly what had happened to my daddy's position. As soon as the council replaced him with a *sure vote* to approve the sell, my grandpa resigned and moved out of the reservation.

My aunt refused to let my grandparents take me with them and she had the backing of the tribe. The tribal jurisdiction allowed her to get approval to keep me with her until my folks returned or until my welfare was put at risk. So, I stayed on the reservation and had been living with her and her abusive husband ever since.

Aunt Teddy and her husband Jack had serious drinking issues and it came to a head when my grands found out I'd been left unattended for an entire weekend when they went on another bender. They couldn't force Jack, but my aunt promised she'd go to rehab for the much-needed help and that Jack was well enough to take care of me while she was gone for thirty days.

If taking care of me meant '*don't get in my way and you can fend*

for yourself,' then Jack had done a brilliant job. I went to bed hungry every night and had to hear him complain about how some kid had ruined his life, how it was my fault Aunt Teddy was at rehab and his life was so boring. Most nights, I'd cry for mommy and daddy, and one night I went looking for comfort in my aunt and uncle's bedroom.

He wasn't in a mood to indulge a crying child. "Get the fuck outta here, boy, and stop that fucking crying before I give you something real to cry about," he growled.

I left, my skinny frame curled up in a bath towel outside his door in my underwear, trying my best to make no noise. I needed to know that he was near and would protect me from any monsters. I was worried the same monsters that had taken my mommy and daddy would try to get me too.

The single wide was old and falling apart. The roof leaked for so many years that they finally had to construct a shed over the top of the entire place. The trailer looked like it was parked in a giant carport. Four stacked cinder blocks for every ten feet of the trailer's length kept it three feet off the ground. You could see the backyard by simply standing in the front yard and bending over and looking through. Of course, it was unlikely you'd be able to see straight through to the other side, considering the amount of junk stored under it. Indoors wasn't much better. Old magazines and scraps of papers were strewn everywhere. Aunt Teddy enjoyed a good gossip magazine, or twenty, and she also loved cutting out coupons she never used. The carpets weren't vacuumed and had remnants of meals from years gone by. If it hadn't been for the mongrel lapping up any scraps he could find, you probably wouldn't have been able to see the carpet. Housekeeping was another area that Aunt Teddy lacked in.

"What are you talking about, dad? I've been taking care of Joey the best I can. Look at the stove; I'm even making his favorite spaghetti dinner tonight." She sounded exhausted and wounded, but still attempted to convince him she was on top of things. I hoped grandpa didn't look too close at the stove, or he'd see the open bottle of beer she'd been drinking before they arrived.

"We know you've tried your best, Teddy, but yesterday was the last straw. I can't be getting calls from tribal members telling me my grandson is wandering the reservation in his underwear at three in the morning looking for something to eat. You and Jack are embarrassing our family."

Grandpa had lowered his voice, but I'd heard it loud and clear. She'd lost her mind at his last comment about being an embarrassment and I heard a glass shatter against the wall. I assumed she'd thrown it.

"Fuck both of you! You're supposed to be on my side. Embarrass the family? Me? That's fucking rich coming from you two. I'm not the one who ran away from everything. Maybe if you'd stuck around, Joe would've come home, you ever think about that? Go ahead, take the little fucker, I don't care. His own fucking parents abandoned him. Jesus! What does that tell you about him?" I heard the cheap dining table chair legs screech across the shoddy linoleum as Aunt Teddy dragged it out, collapsing into it and sobbing hysterically. Soft, faint whispers followed as gram tried to soothe her.

Part of me wanted to stay with Aunt Teddy and Jack. At least if I was here, mommy and daddy would be able to find me when they got home. But I loved my gram and grandpa too. Gram always made good things to eat, and grandpa was strong and could beat up any monsters that tried to get me. These decisions were hard when you were seven.

The sound of footsteps came down the hallway and my door opened. Grandpa stood in the doorway. He appeared broken, sad and defeated like a dog that had just been kicked by his beloved master. His outstretched arms invited me in.

"Come here, baby. Grandpa's got you now."

CHAPTER TWELVE: Landon

Summer was ending in Central Oregon, but it was still hot as hell around these parts. “Must be ninety-five out today,” I bitched to Ronnie. She fanned her face with her hands in response.

“My goddamned face is melting off. Maybe I shouldn’t have put makeup on today, huh?” She had her thumb and middle finger parted as she wiped smeared lipstick from the corners of her mouth. “Yuk! I’m a mess today. You’re absolutely positive we won’t be seeing any single bachelors where we’re going?” she double checked.

She’d joined me to spend a few hours on the river and was busy staring into the lighted mirror after pulling the sun visor down. I was pulling dad’s Mastercraft ski boat behind the X5 as we headed to the cove. We’d packed a cooler of beer and were going to run around the river, maybe get a swim. The main goal was to get some territorial view pictures for my dad. He needed to get photos printed to add to his literature for the website and commercial site *coming soon* signs.

“Coming soon, Dad?” I’d asked earlier. “You don’t even have the parcels acquired to pull this off yet. How is anything *coming soon*?”

He scowled at me angrily. “Never mind that, Junior. Don’t I always get what we need?” He had his game face on. “Now grab the boat, and go get me some pictures. Take the whole day and have some fun too.” He threw a wadded bunch of hundred-dollar bills at me. He was generous when he perceived good shit was happening for him.

I pulled into the marina to launch the boat and Ronnie pushed the visor back up after rescuing her looks and hopped out to assist me. It was a weekday, so the place was quiet when we drove in. I noticed the marina boys lift their heads from their cells. Not one of them budged until Veronica came into view. Every red-blooded guy working or standing around suddenly woke up, as she flounced in her booty shorts and bikini top. One of the slower, gap-toothed, greasy-looking guys had to be slapped upside his head so he wouldn’t miss

out on the highlight reel.

I'll admit the bitch was hot! It sure didn't hurt my rep that the marina guys saw me with Ronnie. I backed the boat into the water and unhooked. A couple of guys pulled the boat up alongside the pier and helped Ronnie hold it while I parked the SUV and trailer. I wandered back from the parking lot just in time to find her royal highness holding court. She was flipping her hair back and acting the shy female part to perfection. Poor lads couldn't spot a praying mantis if one bit their heads off.

"Hide your dicks, boys, she'll bite 'em off!" I joked as I sauntered, climbing into the boat, and grabbing two life vests.

"Now Landon, dear, don't be so crude to these fine, handsome young men." She pursed her lips and acted offended that I'd insulted her new admirers still blankly staring at her, mouths agape like a school of hungry goldfish. I looked through my backpack and double checked for the camera, then using my foot gave the boat a hard push away from the pier. "Bye, boys. I hope you'll be here to help me out when I return," Ronnie said, waving sweetly and making sure they got one more view of her tits and ass.

I steered the boat out to the main river, heading for a private cove I liked to swim in. The secret area was hidden from view of the river and main marina area. Ronnie peeled her skintight shorts off, revealing the bikini bottoms underneath. I couldn't help admiring her toned body, wondering how she did it considering she abhorred workouts of any kind.

"You can really be a heartless bitch, Ron."

"Whatever are you talking about?" she asked coyly, feigning shock at my statement.

"Girl, that was a seriously cruel display of sex appeal to lay on a group of under-sexed teenagers. Dontcha think?"

"Well, perv master, if you can do it to the teen boys, so can I!"

We both wanted to cool down in the water, relax, and get some sun before driving around for my old man's pictures, so I concentrated on getting us to my favorite spot. With no wind or tourists churning the water up, the river was glass. The Mastercraft was a beast and

once away from the marina, I gunned it. The bow lifted slightly before settling back down, and then we seamlessly took off like a bullet shot out of a gun.

"Hey, grab us a beer, will ya." I had to yell over the engine noise. She pulled a couple out, turning the bottle back and forth, examining the label, before she handed me one.

"You're so fucking predictable, Landon. I knew you'd have some shitty, IPA crap today. If I am going to drink beer, you know I'm a Miller Lite gal. All this doesn't just happen by itself," she said, passing her hand up and down her stunning figure. Her hair was flying around like Medusa, but she still maintained her perfect posture, tits front and center.

"Drink it and quit bitching, will ya?"

The warm, dry air felt good on our skin as the boat glided across the river. I rounded a bend and slid the shifter back so I wouldn't miss the entrance to my favorite cove. As the boat came to a slow glide, I saw the giant rock, jutting over the brush just inside near the shore. I'd never seen anyone in here before and was sure that it could only be accessed from the river side. I certainly had never found access from the park side road when I'd tried. The water was plenty deep, but you had to go slow as it narrowed quite a bit. I usually tossed a 20 lb. anchor overboard to keep us securely in one spot. Once we were through the narrow passage lined with trees and brush that hid the cove from the river, I noticed we weren't alone.

The boat was barely in gear and running just above an idle, making it quiet and difficult to hear. We slipped silently through the water, no sound giving away our arrival; three disturbed waterfowl took flight as soon as they realized they had company. The giant rock sat along the water with half of it disappearing into it. About twenty feet up, the rock had a large flat surface, and for the first time since I'd been coming here, it had people on it.

"Whoa!" Ronnie whispered in my ear, now standing alongside me at the steering wheel. She tilted her head to the side, motioning to what I'd already noticed.

"That bitch is buck naked and grinding all over his shit," she gasped excitedly, loving the idea. "I think we're interrupting a couple of love birds, Lannie." She lifted her sunglasses above her eyes to

focus more clearly on the couple. “I’m fine with staying and enjoying the show, but perhaps that’d be rude. What do you think, should we turn around and find another spot?” she asked, purring with sheer pleasure at the spectacle.

Right on cue, the chick with the long black hair turned around toward us. It was the Indian kid that worked at the marina.

“What the fuck?” I muttered to no one in particular. The guy underneath him, laying on his back, sat up and gazed at us. Caleb Hollings!

“Well, well, well… fuck me sideways!” Ronnie squealed. “Check the blonde hunk out, yowzers… OMG… check the Native stud. Yummy… mmm.” She smacked her lips. “He’s smoking hot, Lannie, isn’t he? That’s just so… what am I looking for here… fucking hot.” She was not trying to be subtle at all, grinning from ear to ear. “Both of them are stunning, don’t you agree? Please lord, please, let the blonde stand up. I need a gander at the goods.” She kept yapping, but I wasn’t listening.

The Hollings kid is gay? My dreamboat farmer likes men. My mind imploded from shock and jealousy and my heart hurt.

“Hey asshole, take a picture why don’t you!” the long-haired guy yelled.

“Oh, so sorry boys, we didn’t expect to run into you here, but boy am I glad we did. Forget about the picture, can I take a video?” She giggled at her suggestive humor. “It’s been a lovely sight, perhaps we can stay and watch a bit more?”

The long-haired dude raised an inappropriate finger. I pulled the lever back; there’d be no need for an anchor today.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Joey

The locker room was obnoxiously loud with my teammates showering and behaving like a bunch of fuckups. Above the fray, you could hear a few towel snaps as some underclassman got his ass beat by a wet towel. *I swear, locker rooms are some of the gayest places on the planet.*

My body ached like hell after I finished day three of summer football camp. The grueling two-a-days were busting my ass. It was taking a lot of work to get my timing back and my fitness level up. Thank God Caleb had been running drills with me and helping me at night to get in shape. My senior year would begin in less than two weeks, and I was pumped about the coming season. It felt good to be back on the field with my teammates, even if most of them were crazed idiots. I heard a catcall from the showers and turned in time to see Matt Fitson prancing around with his junk tucked between his legs.

"Hey boys, check out my pussy." *Like I said, locker rooms are gay as fuck.*

"Hey, Crow, step in here a second, will ya?" Coach yelled from across the room. I was standing in just a jock, so I pulled my shorts back on and headed over to coach's office, next to the locker room. I figured the office, and its giant window, were so close to the main locker room so the adults could keep an eye on the inmates in the nuthouse.

"Whoa, Crow to the coach's office."

"Uh-oh Crow, what did you fuck up today?"

"Nice knowing you, Joey."

"What's up, Coach Rogers?" I said, dragging my tired ass into the chair across from his desk. He sat there with a shit-eating grin on

his face.

"Yeah?" I asked sheepishly.

Coach leaned forward, still grinning like a crazy person. "It's yours, Crow!"

I tried maintaining my calm and cool, knowing full well what he meant. "You serious, Coach? I'm starting?"

"You damn right, son! You look sharp and you came back fit as all hell."

I could thank Caleb for the fitness and the drills he ran with me all summer.

"I'm proud of you, kid." Coach rocked back in his chair and put his hands behind his head. "Your daddy would be so proud too, Joey." I thought he might shed a tear.

Coach John Rogers was exactly what you'd think a head coach at a small high school would look like. He was thirty or so pounds overweight, carrying it all in his gut. He was also a teacher at the school and because he'd played ball here himself, naturally he was chosen to coach a bunch of teenaged boys. There'd been many lean years at Madras High and I knew he had high hopes for another *Joseph Crow* championship run. My dad had been the starting quarterback at my high school too. Class of '95 had won districts and made it all the way to the state championship game. That team lost the title game to cross-town rivals, Redmond High. My dad's name was all over trophies and I was reminded of it every time I walked by the *'Pride of Madras High'* trophy case in the main hall of campus.

"Look, Crow, you need to lead this team now. These boys are looking for leadership from the seniors and it starts with you. I expect you to set the example, you got it?" I'd never noticed the silver cap on one of his molars before, but there it was, in full view as a giant grin spread across that round flushed face of his.

"Yes, sir, I hear ya, Coach. I got it. And Coach, thank you, sir, my grandpa is gonna shit himself! Uh, sorry, Coach, but you know what I mean."

I shook his hand and headed back to the locker room. I

practically floated across the stench-filled room on my way to my locker. My huge grin must have revealed the news.

"Don't act all surprised, Crow. You knew it was yours, you stud." Damon Jewel threw his arm around my neck and escorted me back to my locker. Halfway there he moved his hand to my ass, leaving it there, squeezing on me until we neared the wall of lockers, and gave it a big slap. *Seriously? Can it get any gayer?*

I gave a few high fives, slapped a couple asses and quickly grabbed my gear, heading home. On the way out I passed Jaylen Ross, the other senior vying for the starting position. He and I'd competed in football since we were seventh graders. Unfortunately for him, he'd ridden the bench when it came to the quarterback position. We were teammates, but there'd always been animosity between us. There was something weird about him that I couldn't quite put a finger on. He was a good-looking guy for sure, tall at six-four, lanky with a buzzed head that actually looked good on him because he was so handsome, but I'd caught him numerous times glancing my way in the showers, so I had my suspicions. Fairly sure he was straight as an arrow, but still there was something there, I was sure of it. He gave me a sneer and a half-assed nod of acknowledgment. *Screw you, Ross.* I jogged to my car in a hurry to tell Caleb the big news.

Caleb and I hated the end of summer. I had to quit my marina job and start football practice and he had to bust his ass on the farm, wrapping up the growing season. It meant no swimming for me and no seeing Caleb until after practice. On my way home, I ducked into the corner store and grabbed us some cokes and a tube of chips. Caleb usually walked down from his house, and we'd sit under a big tree and catch up. I pulled up and noticed the John Deere sitting along the drive in the closest field; he was working later than usual.

He looked so hunky, leaning against the tractor in the faded jeans he had on, practically bursting out of his tight tee shirt. His biceps had gotten huge that summer from putting away what I figured was the final harvest of hay with his dad. Lifting sixty-pound bales of hay all day had that effect on a body. I wasn't necessarily a fan of farm work, but I was a huge fan of watching Caleb do farm work. A huge smile on my face gave away my pleasure at seeing him. He was throwing up dust with his boots as he headed over from the tractor.

"You look happy, Joey. Did you get it?"

“I sure did, pretty boy!” I wanted to plant my face on his, but we knew better.

“I had no doubt. Being on the receiving end of your passing arm this summer, I just knew!” He tapped my arm affectionately as he congratulated me.

“Fuck, Caleb! I wish your father would have let you join. You’re fast as shit and so damn big, nobody gonna tackle your sweet ass once you got the ball,” I said, knowing full well it was futile.

We sat down, crossing our legs, and I popped the top off the chip can, exposing perfectly stacked pieces of heaven. I stuffed my mouth full and then tilted the open end of the can toward him.

“What’s up with the tractor? You gonna be out all night?” I nodded at the big green machine as Caleb took a handful of chips and leaned against the tree.

“It’ll be dusk for sure. We’re going to try for a third plant. My father told me the forecast says it’ll be hot until the end of September. If that’s the case, I’ll be lucky if he lets me go to school this year.”

I sat close to him, knowing that since we were on the farm there’d be no cuddling or latitude for handsy moves. He leaned in for some more chips and took a few sniffs.

“Geeesh, Joey, you smell. Didn’t you shower after practice today?” he said, waving his hand in disgust after getting a whiff of my 3-hour, ninety-degree heat body.

“I figured you’d be jealous if I let all this hotness get eye banged in the showers by the other guys,” I said with a wink, before adding, “I didn’t shower because I wanted to get out here as fast as I could and tell my boyfriend he was dating the starting quarterback of the football team. What you think of that, you fucking lucky farm punk? Huh? You handle all this?” I teased, moving my hands up and down my body exaggeratingly.

“Punk, you say. You want this farm punk to remind you who’s stronger? You’re lucky I love you,” he said bending toward me to get me to jump. I was the jock in this relationship, but we both knew who was stronger.

Old Man Johnson drove past in his huge Dodge pickup and honked and waved at us, probably wondering why the tractor was idle on the edge of the road.

"I'll handle it all right. Right after you shower… Crow!" he teased, using my teammates nickname for me. We sat there for another 20 minutes catching up on the day before he had to get back to the tractor. "See you tonight?" he asked in his sweet, innocent boyish way.

"Yep! And showered too. Then we'll see what you think of your stud." I lowered my voice even though no one was anywhere near and leaned closer. "I love you, you know that, right?" I squeezed his knee. "See you tonight."

I hopped up, crossed fifteen feet of drive and got in the car. I waited to see if he'd look back as he made his way back to the tractor. I admired my beautiful farmer as he trotted across the field. Just as I was about to give up waiting, he looked back over his shoulder. "I love you, too," he mouthed, grinning as he pulled himself into the tractor.

I backed out and onto the road, punched the on button to my sound system and let *'I can't drive 55'* by Sammy Hagar blast through my tinny speakers for the short ride home. I was excited to tell the grands the news.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Caleb

The last of the leaves made their final glide to the freezing ground, another September checked off the calendar. I barely had time between school letting out and grabbing the bus home to help on the farm before dark. I hated that as a senior I had to take the bus with kids as young as sixth graders, but Joey had football practice every day after school and couldn't drive me home until after five. My father and I still had plenty of work left, things like prepping the buildings and equipment for the coming winter, winterizing pipes in the irrigation system, all the long list of items owning a large farm required. I was proud of the fact that I'd grown up doing this work. I felt confident that when it came time for me to take over, I'd be ready. Father was more jovial than usual lately, so I assumed we must have had a decent year. He'd informed me that he'd be at school to pick me up that afternoon because he had an important meeting that he wanted me to go to.

I strolled out of the front door of school after checking in with Joey. I gave him a quick update on my errand and asked if he'd be stopping by later.

His appearances at my house these past few weeks had improved in the romance department significantly. "Does a snake change his clothes?" he joked. "Damn straight, I'll be there. I'm craving farmer tonight and you're on the menu."

I sat alone on the four-foot-high concrete wall that had the school's name chiseled into it. The expansive lawn was behind me, and beyond that the giant four-story brick school building stood just on the edge of town. Madras High School was the largest building in town. The original school had burned down back in the sixties and this concrete behemoth had replaced it.

After ten minutes of staring into space out of boredom, I saw my father's new pickup truck pull in.

Two weeks prior, I'd gone into town with him shopping for it and was surprised by the fact that he'd chosen new instead of used, even more shocked that he purchased a vehicle with some options. He had never purchased a truck with power windows and air conditioning even though our temperatures routinely exceeded ninety degrees. We went to the local Ford dealership and after more than an hour's worth of negotiating, I'd gotten bored waiting for him. I started browsing around the lot to kill time when I noticed the 09 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon. I looked under the hood, crawled under the chassis scouring for rust, and then checked the odometer for mileage. I sat in the driver seat, imagining myself driving to school when my father came over.

"You like this, Caleb?"

"Yes, sir, it has low miles and Jeeps have a good reputation for quality," I said, proceeding to educate him with a few other facts as I followed him to the Ford truck he'd just bought.

My father and his white pickup stopped in front of the school, and I hopped in.

"Where are we going, sir?"

"I need to pick up the new license plates that came in over at Ford."

It seemed unimportant to have me ride along for that, but I knew better than to question my father. "We also need some lumber if we're going to finish the new shed. I'll need your help loading it at Alderman's Lumber," he said, as I settled in for the five-minute ride across town. The owner of our local lumberyard, Mr. Alderman, was also an Elder at our church, so they were close and supported each other's business. He purchased his feed hay from us and father always thanked him by buying from his lumberyard.

Mr. Alderman lost a son three years back to a hunting accident and had leaned hard on my father to cope with his grief. I hadn't been close to Howie even though we were the same age; Joey and I thought he was an obnoxious kid. I felt disappointed in myself ever since.

Traffic on the highway was light as we drove through town, which is usual for Madras in the off-season. The snow skiers would be clogging the highway once Mt. Hood opened for ski season.

“Hey, they still have that Jeep on the lot,” I said as we drove in.

“So they do,” he said, acting disinterested. My father was rarely excited about anything except God, the church, and the farm. *I wonder where family fits into things.*

The place was quiet. A lone sales guy approached us until he noticed the temp registration taped to the window. Realizing that our vehicle had been recently purchased, he stopped in his tracks and frowned, appearing dejected at the lost potential sale and headed back to his post.

“I’ll just be a minute. I need to grab the plates and a lot-boy to install them.”

“Ok, sir, I’m gonna look around.”

I wandered over to the black Jeep to have another look only to discover a *sold* sign resting on the front dash. *Lucky someone,* I thought, losing my enthusiasm as my father approached me. There was a man in a tie accompanying him. He had a severe limp; my father was walking slower in a gesture of politeness. Father could be a harsh and severe man for sure but behaving like a good Christian was a priority for him.

“Caleb, this is Mr. Roberts,” my father said. “Calvin,” my father used his first name, “this is my boy, Caleb.”

“Well, gosh darn it, Hollings. You said he was a kid. This boy is bigger’n you and a far sight better looking.” Mr. Roberts reached his hand out for me to shake.

“Nice to meet you, sir.”

“Whoa, and as strong as an ox too, I see.” He shook his hand up and down, like I’d broken it. “So, Caleb, your daddy was telling me you took a shine for that Jeep over there, is that true son?”

“Yes sir, I did, but I see it’s been sold,” I said politely, disappointment clearly etched on my face.

“Well, son, you’re right about one thing, it has been sold. Some rascally old farmer from just outside of town, around your neck of the

woods actually, purchased it just today." Mr. Roberts smiled and reached into his pocket, pulling out a set of keys "It's yours son, and you can thank your parents for the fine gift, young man."

I stood there for five seconds in disbelief before I could barely get the words out. "Really, you bought this… for me?" I looked from my father to Mr. Roberts. "It's really mine, sir?"

"It is son. I told you last week, we had a good year, and you were a big part of why. You're eighteen; every man needs his own set of wheels when he becomes an adult." He patted me on the back, which was the most he was used to offering in the way of affection. "You worked hard, Caleb, it's the least your momma and I could do for you."

He stood there like a proud father whose son who had grown up way too fast. "Thank you so much, father. I can't believe it," I said, as I turned around and watched Mr. Roberts remove the sold sign. "Can I drive by school to show Joey after he gets out of football practice?" I begged.

"Sure, son. I slapped insurance on it earlier. Be gentle, it's not a farm truck. Treat her good and be home before dark."

I hugged my father for the first time in probably five or six years. "Don't worry, sir, I'll baby her real good." I jumped into the Jeep and started it up. I had my very own vehicle; it was all mine. I couldn't believe my fortune or the fact that my parents had given me such an extravagant gift. Joey was going to have kittens when he saw this.

Joey's Honda sat amongst a few scattered cars and trucks. Most belonged to other players and a couple were probably the faculty's. He must have been showering, so I parked and was busy going over the knobs and dials of the Jeep while I referenced the owner's manual. I'd parked right alongside his car knowing he'd be out soon. When he finally walked out, he was with another player.

He had his team sweats on with the hoodie pulled up over his wet hair. He looked so darn handsome, moving like the sexiest man on earth. I felt guilty allowing my mind to think that way. I doubted I could ever tell him that. He liked when I called him cute because he thought it was such an innocent thing to say, and I really liked when he referred to me as one hot mother…

I didn't recognize Joey's teammate. They seemed to be having some sort of serious discussion. They paused by the parking lot's edge, and I saw Joey turn to the smaller guy. The stranger had his head down, looking dejected. He was tugging the bottom of his jersey, and it was clear something was wrong. Joey reached his hand out and grabbed his shoulder. His compassion was clear on his face. The guy leaned into his arms and Joey embraced him, pulling him close as the boy slumped against him. Joey allowed him to remain there, his head on Joey's chest as he gently rubbed his back. *What's happening here?*

My mind was reeling, panic set in and my heart felt like it had been stabbed. Why was he holding his teammate like that? He'd only done that with me. My heart dropped from my chest, landing squarely in my stomach. Fighting fear, I clenched my throat, barely able to breathe. He hadn't known I'd be there after practice; maybe he liked this guy too and had been hiding it from me.

My throat wouldn't release as I thought about Joey and his teammate, a stranger I'd never met, another jock type that he showered with. Of course, it had to be true, I wasn't enough for Joey. He was the star quarterback of our school; he could have anyone he wanted. My eyes filled with tears, and I started the Jeep, steering to my right to leave. The exhaust noise cut the silence, making Joey turn and spot me. He had a puzzled look on his face as he tried to put it all together—me, the unfamiliar vehicle, and what I was doing there. He seemed surprised, like he'd been caught doing something wrong. Joey still had the other boy in his arms as I drove past him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Joey

I stared at the taillights of the black Jeep Caleb was driving. Whose was it? What was he doing at school so late? I had a 10th grader crying in my arms because his folks were divorcing, and he was being forced to move away from Madras with his mom. I stood still for a moment until Thompson pulled back, embarrassed by his show of emotions.

"I'm sorry, Crow, shit bro! That was such a pussy thing to do," he said.

"Look bro, it's not a pussy move, ok? I get it and it sucks man."

I tried to be supportive, but my mind was totally gobsmacked by what I had seen just now. He looked confused, upset, distraught, maybe even heartbroken? *Uh-oh… shit!*

I finally connected the dots as to what he'd probably thought he saw. He wasn't confident about love and dating. I'd just told him he was my boyfriend and then he saw me embracing another dude. If I know Caleb, he's halfway home and a fucking mess. *Halfway home and in some stranger's Jeep?*

"Listen up, Thompson, it's going to be ok. I'm here for you dude, if you need me. You've got my cell number, use it if you need a buddy, ok?" I gently released myself from him and gave him a slap on his chest, hoping to help his embarrassment. "You're a tough kid, Tate, you'll be fine."

Thompson's mom had just pulled into the parking lot. He wiped his eyes and headed for his mom's car.

Turning back, he said, "Thanks, Crow."

The poor kid walked away, slouched over like someone had taken all the wind out of his sails.

I hopped into the Civic and headed home, starving for some of Gram's delicious food. Caleb wasn't allowed to have a cellphone and I knew calling their land line was a waste as well since his old man didn't allow calls after 6 pm. The Hollings family sat down for dinner promptly at six. Prayers were said before the meal and a sixty-minute bible study followed after. So, talking was impossible.

I drove past Caleb's, straining my neck, hoping to see him outside. The black Jeep was parked in the driveway next to a new Ford truck. *What's up with that? Old man Hollings hit the lottery?*

Coming up the last bit of road to home, I lifted my sweatshirt and rubbed my hand along my ribs. "Ouch, that's fucking sore!" I moaned out loud, recoiling from the pain.

I'd taken quite a hit during practice. "That's why he's wearing a red jersey, Kingston, he's your quarterback, for fuck's sake!" Coach screamed at Jeff Kingston, the defensive back. I'd deal with Kingston tomorrow.

"Dumb fuck," I mumbled.

After dinner, I gingerly scaled the stairs and stood in front of my bedroom mirror. I peeled my tee shirt off and stood in my boxers, admiring my lean muscular body. My chest had gotten fuller, and my biceps were well-defined after the amount of gym time we had during football season. I noted the bruise forming on my right side, rubbing it gently with the ball of my hand, trying to ease the pain. I was horny as shit but decided against jacking off because I was going over to Caleb's later anyway. Good thing too, I had some explaining to do, but after that, I'd be drooling all over him for sure. Maybe he could massage my bruised rib. Maybe massage a bit lower too? My dick twitched in my boxers.

My ribs were killing me, so I decided to lie down for a while before heading over to the Hollings farm. I stared at my hero on the poster that hung on my bedroom wall.

"What you think of last week's game, Sonny?"

Sonny Sixkiller, who stared back at me from his perch on the wall, didn't respond to my question. Grandpa had given me the poster when I was nine years old.

"That Indian boy was a legend, son," grandpa said.

Grandpa shared his stories from when Sonny was a quarterback at Ashland High in Ashland, Oregon, back in the late sixties. Being close in age, grandpa worshipped the local Indian boy legend that went on to play college ball for The University of Washington Huskies. He'd followed his career through college and was immensely proud that a Native American boy played for a Division 1 university. Sonny wore #6 in honor of his given name, Sixkiller. That's why my dad wore Sonny's number and why I wear the #6 as well.

My eyes popped opened as a tap on my bedroom door disturbed my nap.

"Joey? Get up, love. Breakfast is ready and you're running late," Gram said.

"K, Gram. I'll be down in a second," I grumbled, moaning as I stretched through the pain from my ribs that were also waking up painfully. After the sleep fog cleared, I realized that gram had said *breakfast*. I'd slept straight through the night again, not making it to Caleb's… again. Dread and fear made its way to my gut.

Oh no! Now what's he gonna think? Fuck me!

My mind raced as I threw on some jeans and a sweatshirt and headed downstairs. *Oh shit, oh shit, he must be so upset… damn it!* I ran into the bathroom and brushed my teeth as fast I could. Moving quickly, I yelled, "No time for breakfast, gram, I'm late." I held a hand up as I tried to scoot past.

"Joey, take this biscuit at least. And this banana." I swept past her, grabbing the food from her hand and heading out the door. I had to get over to Caleb's before the bus did, so I could pick him up before school.

The bus stop was ahead 100 yards. "Come on! Come on! Come on! Where are you, Angel?" I arrived at the bus stop and no Caleb. *Shit!* The place was full of the usual huddle of kids, some grade schoolers were with their parents. I glanced over to his house and saw that the mysterious Jeep was gone. I pulled onto the shoulder of the gravel road and sat there for a minute. Just then I heard the bus grinding down its gears and decelerating as it slowed to pick up the

students. *Where the fuck are you?*

I was stressing now, certain he'd spent all night dwelling on and stressing out over me and Tate Thompson, and me bailing on him. My heart ached, knowing he probably waited for me in the dark, wishing I'd show up and offer a silly explanation and it would all be ok. My eyes filled, my gut hurt, nauseous with worry. *Shit, Crow! Going soft much?* Who was I kidding? He was my life, my future, my everything. Everything I was, every good thing in my life, was because of that boy. I could never hurt him and knew I had to get to school fast.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: Caleb

"Well, at least I have my new Jeep," I whispered to myself, trying to rally my spirits. I got up this morning feeling a sense of loss I'd never felt before. It hurt, deep inside, and I felt like I couldn't breathe. What would I do without Joey? How could I face him at school and act like his friend? He'd given up waiting for me to take more sexual initiative, he must have gotten bored. I didn't have many friends at school, Joey was my best friend, my only true friend. Most of the others came with Joey and his popularity. How would they treat me now that he had a new boyfriend? I sat quietly in the Jeep, trying to get the will to go into the school and confront my new reality.

"Hey, Hollings!" Pete Hastings hollered from twenty yards away as I climbed out of the Jeep. "New wheels, my man?" He walked over, hand up for a *way-to-go* high five. "Looks spendy, dude, who died? Was it your old man?"

"No one died. My folks gave it to me for a senior year gift." I was a bit flustered, looking around to see if Joey had arrived yet. Several cars pulled in with music blaring and Jaylen Ross drove by, casually giving me the bird. *What did I ever do to you?* He disliked Joey, so I guess that included me. *Well, perhaps he'd like me now.*

Joey always parked where all the jocks parked. The entire school knew that those spots were for jocks only. Not finding him, I turned to Pete and told him I'd give him a ride to McDonalds at lunch. *Yes*, Charity could come. Only the seniors could leave campus for lunch, and now, with my car, I was one of those lucky seniors too.

"Cool man, I'll meet you and Crow here," he said. Whereas it was great that most students knew we came as a pair, how would I tell everyone when *we* were not *we* any longer?

Maybe they'll see Joey and his new boyfriend and just assume it's over.

I took one more look around and headed into school. The hallways were the usual loud tunnels of teen angst. Kids yelling at each other, lovers holding hands and kissing, boys preening like peacocks, daring one another to try and take their places. Ms. Hanks was standing outside her English class, directing traffic and dispensing advice on making it to our assorted classes on time.

"Come on students, chop-chop, let's move it along." She clapped her hands. "Mr. Hollings," she acknowledged, as I hurried past.

Just like the parking lot, the jocks and cheerleaders had their section of lockers. Joey and I usually met there between classes, shared a flirty squeeze, longing to be touched by one another. I shoved all my books into my backpack for my morning classes so I could go directly to class without having to see him with his new guy. Joey and I had no classes together until after lunch, and I wasn't sure what I'd do then but guessed I would figure it out.

The bell rang after the biology class exactly at 11:55 am, and I leaped to my feet and headed for the parking lot. By the time I got there, Pete and his girlfriend Charity were leaning against the Jeep, making out. Pete raised his hand again for the prerequisite high five.

"Let's roll, Hollings! I gotta see what this bitch can do," he said, slapping the hood of my Jeep.

"Caleb?" Charity interjected. "I told Joey we were all going to lunch, so can we hold up a sec? I figured you'd be ok with that."

She gave me the *we all know about you two, and its totes ok* look. "Yeah, sure, of course," I stammered.

Was the new boyfriend coming? How would I handle that and keep my composure? I pressed the key fob to unlock the SUV and saw Joey running across the parking lot. He was alone, *thank you lord,* his face clenched, frustration clearly visible. I knew his expressions well and when his lower lip was in a fight with his teeth, he was either worried, uneasy, or confused. Right now, it appeared to be all three.

"Caleb!" he said, out of breath. "I fell asleep last night, I'm so sorry." I gave him a cold distant look; he still had his lower lip pinched by his upper teeth. "I can totally explain."

“Hey,” I said weakly, opening my door and gesturing that he go around to the other side.

“Shotgun!” Pete yelled.

“Like fuck you do, Hastings!” Joey spat. “Ride in the back with your girl.”

“Why? So, you can ride in front with yours?”

Joey stood outside his door, glaring at his buddy. “What the fuck you just say?” He was obviously not in a mood for a ribbing.

“Nothing, Crow. Calm the fuck down, broski.”

“Like I thought, punk.”

Apparently, Joey was in a foul mood. Pete got in the back as I assumed he would, and the pair in the back quickly scooted into each other and began whispering and goofing around. Charity giggled as Pete kissed her neck.

“Peter… you know I can’t have a hickey, I’m head cheer!” she screamed and laughed. “Pete, stop it. I got to set an example.”

“I got your example right here!” he snorted, grabbing his crotch. “Not to mention, I can give you a thousand examples of when me and the head cheerleader broke all those bullshit rules!”

“So, this is yours?” Joey began, looking around the interior. He kept his hands in his lap, rather than taking hold of mine, a sure sign we wouldn’t be doing that anymore.

“Yeah, my father picked me up from school yesterday, remember? It turns out it was to give me this.” I tried hard to speak normally as I stared at the road ahead.

It was only six blocks to McDonalds. I was hurting, and I could see that he had something on his mind too. He was an honest and caring guy, so I knew he was going to do the right thing. He would never just show up with a new guy in tow.

I had no appetite for lunch, so I just ordered a chocolate shake.

Pete and Charity were already eating and mashing lips in the corner booth.

As we stood waiting for the rest of our order, Joey said, “Hey, I know we can’t talk here with the two lovebirds riding along, but I need to explain.” His eyes pleaded with me as he spoke.

“It’s ok, Joey, you don’t need to explain anything to me. We never said we were exclusive.”

“What are you talking about? It’s not like that. I shouldn’t *have* to tell you we’re exclusive for fuck’s sake. You know we are, and I don’t need to remind you,” he said, gritting his teeth. He tried avoiding looking at my pained face. “We can’t have this talk here. Can you please just hang out in the bleachers today during practice? Please come, Angel?” *I had a hard time saying no to Joey.*

“Sure.”

Joey reached out and grabbed my sleeve. “Hey? Hold up, Caleb. What the fuck’s this?” He held his palms up, questioning me. “I don’t appreciate the cold shoulder. You really think I have something going with Tate? Really, a fucking 10th grader?” He stood there gawking at me, disappointment written on his face.

“Please… just show up, will ya?”

“I said yes, didn’t I? I’ll be there.”

I arrived at the football field and sat in the bleachers with about twenty minutes of practice to go. Despite the hurt, I couldn’t help but feel proud watching him on the field leading his team; he was a true leader, and I was certain we’d remain friends after the ache faded. He’d been the starter our junior year as well, and he’d learned so much from that experience and was taking firm control of his team this year. They respected Joey and knew he led by example, so getting them to listen hadn’t been a problem for him. He was hard on the players, but the first one to compliment a teammate after they’d done well.

Joey dropped back the recommended three steps after the hike and made his reads. He was smooth and a natural in his position. He could sling the ball out of his hands so effortlessly that it looked like magic. I’d run through these drills with him many times, I knew them

all, and knew his timing too. I hadn't watched him practice this year though, and he'd certainly improved his mechanics. He had a lethal arm and opposing teams' defenses had found that out this year. I could see why he was getting all the good press.

Joey had been upbeat the past six weeks of school. He had his team at 5-1 for the season and the only loss was an away game to Redmond High, but we'd get another shot at them later in the season. He'd been playing out of his mind and even had some stories in our local paper with headlines that read, *'Legendary quarterback's son heading up Madras High's winning team'* and one two weeks ago that read, *'Outstanding quarterback Joey Crow and the Buffs, destroys opposing defenses again.'*

Even my father had remarked at the story at breakfast one morning last week.

"Your pal, Crow, is really proving himself this year." It was weird hearing father use Joey's last name. "Did you know his dad was an amazing athlete when we were in school together? I was a year ahead of him, but he'd already established himself as a football star."

I looked at my father in astonishment. He'd never said more than a word or two about Joey and certainly never mentioned knowing his father.

He continued, "I must admit, it's incredible to see how much he looks like his father. It's like seeing Joe all over again." He stared in space, revisiting the past. "Like you, son, I had the farm to work on. I wasn't allowed the time commitment for sports." He took his last sip of coffee and got up, leaving an empty breakfast plate on the table. "Tell Joey I'm rooting for him."

In eighteen years of life, my father had never spoken to me about sports. Heck, he even saw Joey regularly, and hadn't once even acknowledged his father or the fact that Joey was a star football player.

Coach Roberts gathered the team at midfield to offer a few words of advice. As the others broke away and headed to the showers, Joey looked up, pointed to his watch and then pointed to the parking lot.

The Jeep was parked near Joey's car. I turned on the heat due to the cold outside. My feelings were hurt, but after seeing and talking with Joey at lunch, I knew I needed to trust our eleven years

of friendship and believe him. Seeing what I thought I'd seen terrified me, but this was Joey we were talking about. Would he really just toss me to the side?

I noticed Joey jogging across the parking lot in his Letterman jacket, long hair flying around his face.

He signaled for me to lower my window. "Hey, thanks for showing up. Can we hang out tonight? I would have asked you at lunch but sensed you were upset and would have said *no*. I need to spend time with you tonight."

"I'd need to ask my parents. Do we have time for you to follow me home?"

"Why don't I just head home, you can pick me up at my house if your folks are ok with it. Also, can we drive your rig later?" He asked, a laugh escaping his mouth, realizing he'd just volunteered my new Jeep.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: Joey

"Are we ok?" I asked. Caleb had picked me up and we were headed down to the marina. I was digging being the passenger while my hot boyfriend drove me around in his tough-guy Jeep. We hadn't been down there since football season started. I couldn't remember being at the park at night, especially during the colder months.

"Not sure," he answered. "I don't think you and Tate are an item, if that's what you're asking," he admitted. "I guess I got carried away. I'm hurt, but I should've trusted you."

He still seemed disappointed, acting distant, but I didn't want to ruin our evening. He hadn't changed his clothes from earlier. You knew it was a school day when Caleb had his dress Wranglers on. They were so tight that if he'd had a dime in his back pocket, you could've read the date on it.

"Have I told you that you're the hottest guy in our school?"

He smiled, blushing at my flattery. I was trying to lighten the mood and he knew exactly what I was up to.

"Let's drop it, ok? I was being dumb and I'm sorry. No need to butter me up."

"You're not dumb, Angel, but you do know better, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess." He didn't sound convinced.

He continued staring straight ahead into the darkness, trying to be mad at me. His profile was classic all-American chiseled handsomeness held together perfectly by his square jawline. The boy was hot and had zero idea. He was oblivious to the looks he got at school. I'd caught Jaylen Ross lusting after him, eye banging my guy, and warning bells went off in my mind. I'd never liked Ross much.

I reached my hand over and rested it between his legs, close to his crotch. I left it there for a moment to see his reaction. After a minute of rubbing his thigh while he ignored me, I moved my hand up and squeezed his bulge. I felt his dick jump almost immediately.

"You like that Mr. Sexy Jeep Driver?" I asked soothingly, teasing him and rubbing more insistently. Caleb lifted his ass off his seat and up toward my hand, stretching his legs, trying to relieve some pressure.

"Whoa, Joey, come on man. I'm driving," he scolded but his dick had begun filling out his already form-fitting Wranglers.

I had a score to settle with him about even entertaining the idea that I'd been with another guy. "So, pretty boy, now that I have your full attention, let me ask you a few follow-up questions from earlier today." I leaned into him. "Would that be ok, pretty boy?" My voice was low and suggestive, and I began rubbing the outline of his dick even harder. "Do I look like someone who has time for another fella on the side? Hmmm stud? You really think I want that, do ya?" I was adding even more pressure to his crotch. "Do I look like the type of fool that would think he could do better than the *Hollings* boy?" I put extra emphasis on his last name, making it sound uppity.

He was stiff as shit now, there was no hiding the large outline in his jeans.

"What would little old Joey do without his big bulging farm boy to rub on?" I put my face against his ear, lowering my voice. "This feel ok, hunk?" I said, continuing to massage the outline of his dick with my hand. He moaned low and mumbled something incoherent. I rubbed harder and sat on the console to get closer, placing my mouth on his chin and then licked all the way up his face, ending with a guttural moan in his ear.

"Oh Jesus… that feels so good, Joey." He reached for a can of Coke that my leg was pushing out of the cupholder to prevent it from falling on the Jeep's carpeting, but he lost his grip. The can tipped over, landing upside down in his lap, soaking his jeans. *Talk about a buzzkill.* His foot stomped down on the brakes, and we came to a screeching halt. The front end slammed down sharply, and the Jeep pulled slightly to the right at the edge of the road and a possible fifty-foot drop. *That woke me the fuck up.*

“Shit! I’m sorry, dude, you ok?”

He let out a long breath he’d been holding in, inspecting the Jeep to see if he’d saved it from cola juice.

“My jeans are drenched, but I’m good. Maybe we should avoid that kinda excitement when I’m driving. I liked it, but that’s a cliff right there.” He gestured out his side of the window.

“It’s dark as shit out there. Freaky ain’t it?”

“Yes, it is, and I’d like to stay on the road so stay on your own side mister.”

I handed him the extra sweatshirt I’d brought to wipe up. We drove the rest of the way down the hill, now laughing about the Coke incident. He parked in a spot nearest the trail that led to the rock. The trail was obscured in the broad daylight, and in the darkness it was nearly impossible to see. The sky was pitch-black, speckles of stars dotting it. The moon, the only light, dimly illuminated our surroundings. If there hadn’t been a county survey stake visible, our marker to its location, I would’ve missed it. I paused, listening and looking around to see if we were the only souls there. The park was deserted this time of year, quiet as hell too. The crickets and frogs had long ago hibernated, preparing for the impending freeze of another Central Oregon winter.

Caleb was gawking at his jeans as he stepped out of the Jeep with raised hands.

“What’d I do now?”

I stood there, thinking and laughing at the image. “Hey, don’t you have your gym clothes in your backpack?”

He raised his hand to point a finger at me. “There ya go! At least one of us has a brain cell left after all that.” He was cheering up and getting back to his lovable self.

I studied every inch of him as he leaned against the open hatch of the Jeep, enjoying the view as he changed. He peeled his jeans and boxers off, trying to get past his shoes and struggling to stay upright. As I stood there beside him, I couldn’t help but take all of him in. He was half naked, starting from the waist and then down to where his

jeans and boxers were stuck around his ankles. *Sweet Jesus! He was stunning*. His muscles rippled as he struggled to keep his balance. His tee shirt hid his stomach and ab muscles, but I found my eyes moving to his blonde pubes and thick cock. My throat caught and I half wanted to cry because he was mine, and half wanted to drop to my knees right there and suck his dick.

What would he do if I did put his dick in my mouth?

He reached out for me to steady him and yanked a leg out of his jeans. I grabbed his arm again as he wriggled and squirmed out of the other pant leg. He wasn't self-conscious about being naked, but I wasn't sure he'd be ready for a bold move like me sucking on his dick just yet.

Freeing himself, he stood there in all his glory. The moonlight accentuated every muscled edge on him. He was beautiful to look at and my heart ached from the love I felt for him. The farm boy innocence was betrayed by how incredibly sexy he was; it wasn't a boy standing there. His thighs were strong and muscular, leading the way to his large, circumcised cock. When had this boy become the man in front of me? How could he possibly think, for one moment, that I'd ever want another. He turned his head and shyly looked at me while still holding my arm.

"Thank you, Joey."

"For what?" I asked. He'd caught me off guard.

"For your patience."

My heart ached at hearing his sweet words and the way he smiled in that heartbreaking way he always did. He was so innocent and such a boyish wonder; eighteen but a baby deer in the woods compared to my lifetime of painful experiences. His parents had sheltered him, they were strict, but they'd been there for him. *Would I ever get over the loss of my parents?*

Having this boy by my side, loving me, helped with the pain. Knowing he was mine and that he needed me, made me protective of him. He trusted me with his care, and he relied on my guidance. I could see it in his eyes. I began to suspect that my boyfriend needed me to show him the way to the physical aspects of our love as well.

"Put your sweats on, Angel," I said, "I want to get down to the rock."

Before he complied, he said, "Hey, hold on a sec." He turned back to the open hatch. "My mother put a blanket in the back with a bunch of road safety items she said I might need."

Caleb climbed back into the Jeep and fished around for the bag of supplies. He tossed a heavy wool blanket to me, and then jumped out.

"Thank ya, Jesus! And thank your mom for the blanket; it's cold out here. And… thanks to you."

He raised an eyebrow. "What'd I do?"

I tilted my head down and stared at his bare lower half. "You crawled in there naked, and it was… so… fucking hot, so thanks."

The park was pitch-black, the moonlight our only light on the trail, so we held hands as we made our way to the water's edge. It felt so amazing to have reconnected, walking hand in hand with the person I loved. This was one of the few times in my life I felt safe, felt like I belonged somewhere and to someone. Admitting that I was in love with Caleb and deciding to take my grandpa's advice was turning out to be better than I'd dared to wish. The trust I had in Caleb and the love I felt from him validated my decision to trust in the possibilities love offered.

The path was overgrown and tough to navigate in the darkness so I held his hand tighter than I probably should have. He gave me a reassuring squeeze as if to say, *I got this, Joey*. Having him pull me along and guide me was a strange sensation and I was reminded of how things had begun to change between us. He was asserting himself in our relationship and more self-assured. There was a stronger, confident boy leading the way that night. Maybe all he'd needed was to know that we were an official couple, and what our sexual preferences meant. The dawning that he was with more than just his best friend, and that his sexual feelings were shared by me gave him confidence.

The large rock glowed in the moonlight, reminding me how our love had begun there many summers ago. I was walking hand in hand with the adult versions of Caleb and myself. We'd left the younger

versions behind at the rock last summer. I had waited our entire childhood for this.

"Dark, isn't it?" he whispered.

"Scared?"

"Not with you here, I'm not."

I squeezed his hand tighter. "Let's spread the blanket over there, away from the water." I pointed to the rock and the low bushes near it. Caleb's mom had done a bang-up job with the blanket. It was wool, very thick, and big enough for two. "Hell, we could live under this thing." I patted a spot next to where I had lain.

He sprawled across the blanket, saving his head for my lap, looking up at me with those sparkling blue eyes and soft picture-perfect skin. It caught my breath. I was overcome with emotion. *Was this what they meant about being 'in' love?*

"Jesus, dude! You're so fucking beautiful. That sounded weird, didn't it?" I felt self-conscious saying that aloud. "Is it ok that I call you beautiful?" I asked, hoping I didn't sound too sappy.

"Sure, of course, Joey. I like it when you say nice things to me, geesh, who wouldn't?" He smiled up at me with perfect white teeth and full soft lips. The dude could model, no doubt, but knowing my shy farm boy, he'd be too bashful for all that.

It was eerily quiet by the river. No watercraft on the river, no traffic from the road, just the two of us lying in silence. We gazed into the sky dotted with billions of stars. The only sounds were from our soft breathing in the deafening quiet of the darkness.

I lifted his head off my lap and scooted alongside him. I traced a finger from the bottom of his chin along the outline of his lips, caressing each one. Pulling myself closer, I slid my head under his arm. He was warm and solid. I unzipped his Carhartt jacket and slid my hand under his tight tee shirt and began rubbing his flat stomach, slowly moving up and gliding over his massive pecs. "I'll never get over your body, stud. You're so fucking hot."

"Mmm, that feels so good, Joey."

“Hey, handsome, look at me.”

I placed my eager mouth on his. We kissed gently at first, enjoying the sweetness of our coming together. It wasn’t long before he rolled over to face me, and our mouths crashed into each other with a renewed eighteen-year-old eagerness. He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me on top of him.

“Whoa, stud. Easy on your guy,” I faux complained, my ribs still a bit sore, shocked again by his strength.

“You started it, mister.”

I sat up to my knees, sitting on his crotch, straddling his waist and squirmed out of my jacket. I pulled my sweatshirt over my head, revealing my bare chest. He gazed up at me and grabbed my hips, just above my belt.

“Wow, Joey… you look… you look sexy.” He fumbled over his words.

“Did you say sexy, choir boy?” I teased.

“I guess I did, yeah.” He pulled his jacket and tee shirt off and then using both hands, gestured me to come back down, so I slid into his arms. Our bare chests connected, and the familiar smell of my handsome boy filled my nose. Ivory soap still clung to his pores and that fresh scented antiperspirant he wore reminded me of our countless nights struggling to contain our urges. I felt pressure in my jeans and the bulge in his pushed against me.

“I wanna be naked,” he whispered.

“Really? In this cold? You sure?” I asked the appropriate questions, but I knew I wanted it too.

“We can fold the blanket in half and crawl inside like we do our sleeping bags.”

My dick did a blood refill and I crawled off him, landing on my bare back. I kicked my tennis shoes off and slid out of my pants and boxers in one swift move.

“Here, lemme get ‘em,” I murmured, reaching for his sweats.

“Kick your shoes off.”

I watched him use his toes to free himself from his shoes and then I pulled his sweats down, forgetting he was commando underneath. *Holy fuck!* He looked like a sexy slab of beef, a porn star, a delicious farm boy, lying there naked in the dim light. How could I possibly have known about those descriptors? Easy, I had a computer and a door that locked at home. The videos I’d jacked a few loads to also served as an education regarding what guys liked, and I had my mind on a little reenactment.

I crawled back on top, straddling him and sat on his crotch, rubbing my ass over his cock. His full tool was grinding along my ass crack, driving me nuts. I had my hands on his chest to balance my lithe body while I melted into him. His eyes rolled into the back of his head, and he lifted his ass off the blanket, willing himself to be as close as possible. I leaned forward, putting my mouth on his while stretching the length of my body to match his. Our cocks collided and rubbed furiously on each other. We’d been there before, our cocks knew the routine, but I was about to introduce my boy to something new and I knew he was going to like it… a lot!

I moved my mouth to his neck and nibbled on it, moving it back and forth from his ear. I felt him tightening and convulsing under my body weight while we continued grinding, cock to cock.

“Do you trust me?” I moaned in his ear.

He responded with the longest, slowest cautious *yes* I’d ever bore witness to.

“Good answer, stud, you’re gonna love this. Now relax.”

I placed an arm on each side of his head, in a push-up position, and came up to my knees, and proceeded to kissing him from where I’d been to where I was heading next. He lay very still, his arms stiff beside his body as I made my way down his chest, stopping to nibble on his nipples. His breath hitched as I bit down on one, while his cock flexed in anticipation. His erect nipples stuck out of a rock solid, farm work enhanced chest.

I moved lower, my tongue sliding all the way to his first row of abdominals. His hand came up to my arm and I quickly grabbed it, firmly placing it back to his side.

“Joey…” he whispered, afraid of what was happening.

“Don’t. I’m in charge now.” His eyes snapped open, questioning what that meant. “Relax,” I said.

My lips and tongue continued their march toward the promised land. He quivered and twitched under my touch. I felt powerful and in control of my role as his teacher. I’d lead the way; I knew it was my job to guide him down this path. There was no way church boy would have been able to initiate the next natural evolution of our love.

I nudged his legs apart with my knees, bringing mine between them. He tried to sit up to see what I was going to do next. Once again his eyes wide with fear, but full of hot desire. I gently placed a hand on his chest, pushing him back. I knew he was afraid, but I also knew he wanted me to make him a man. I leaned over and pulled his girthy, swollen eight-inch dick upright, placing the tip directly in my mouth. He lifted his ass off the blanket, trying to shove it fully in.

“Hang on, stud. Let me do all the work.”

“I’m not gonna last, Joey. I know I won’t.”

I moved my mouth from his head, but still held his shaft firmly.

“Calm down, Angel. Lay back. Force yourself to think of anything but this. Can you do that?” I asked, trying to reassure him.

“I… I’ll try,” he gasped.

I brought my mouth back to the tip and gently slid my tongue over his head, taking measure of him. He was lying very still, keeping his arms securely by his side. I slowly took more of him into my mouth, his cock expanding my jaw. It was the first mouth wrapped around his cock and the first cock filling my mouth. I’d seen this done and knew instinctively what would feel incredible, so I kept squeezing more of his dick into my mouth until it hit the back of my throat, two inches of meaty shaft still exposed. I guessed that I’d reached my limit.

I worked up a moist lather on his cock and applied more friction to it. Bobbing up and down as I slid it into my waiting mouth. I felt powerful and horny as fuck as I tasted his dick in my mouth. *Fuck, I was sucking Caleb Hollings’ dick.* If I’d questioned my desire for

him in the past, all of the doubt had disappeared. I knew that I wanted this, and I craved more of what I knew was coming for him and me.

His legs tightened and stretched out as he writhed under my hungry mouth. He bucked like a colt being broken in, his hips lifting, jabbing, struggling in raw pleasure. He grabbed the side of my head, holding me on his cock.

"I love it. I love it. Keep going, Joey. Oh my gosh, it's nice, it's so nice." An unmistakable growl accompanied his sweet voice.

I grabbed my own dick and started pulling on it. I knew he'd be blowing his load any minute, surprised he'd lasted that long. I kept my right hand on his swollen cock, sliding up and down, covering as much of it as I could with my wet mouth, with my left hand jacking hard on my erection. I was surprised at my level of arousal, having my dick in my hand while sucking his was driving me crazy. I felt that tingle a guy gets when he knows a load is chambered in the holster. My groin was in crisis, I needed to come but fought it, enjoying the additional pleasure of suffering for release. Caleb held my head tight, adding to my level of excitement at the idea of him using my mouth for such an act. He was tensing, then relaxing, then tensing up again, his ass off the blanket, all the *tell-tale* signs of a nearing orgasm.

I fisted our dicks furiously and got ready for something I'd never experienced as an orgasm blasted into my mouth.

"Ohhh… I feel… I feel…" he was mumbling, turning his head from side to side as he convulsed and thrust his cock into my waiting mouth, holding a firm grip on my head, afraid I'd stop the roller coaster of joy he was on. "Oh my god… I'm gonna shoot, holy… uhhh." I felt the pulse of his shaft moving my reward out. He grunted deep, guttural moans and his body went completely stiff, rigid with convulsions, depositing every drop into me.

"Fuuucckkk… yeah," I mumbled, a dick still in my mouth. "Fuck… fuck… fuuucckkk." I gritted my teeth, squeezing every last ounce of life outta my throbbing dick.

I collapsed onto Caleb's chest and felt his arms come around me, holding me tight. Both of us breathing heavily as we eased down slowly from our joint orgasms. Thinking he may be feeling embarrassed or ashamed, I prepared my *you're going to be fine* speech, but I was way off on that assessment.

“Ok, I’m over Tate Thompson, you’re forgiven,” he said in my ear, smirk in place. “When can we do that again?”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: Caleb

I had Joey in my arms, staring into the night sky. I wasn't a virgin anymore. Certainly not an expert yet, feeling a little naughty maybe, and oh so good. I'd been awakened from something I hadn't known was imprisoning me, set free by my best friend, a man, my lover. Visions of my church upbringing ran through my mind, trying to set up a shop of doubt, a shop of fear and regret. Too late, that prison door was slammed shut after I ran willingly out of it and into the arms of a very naughty boy.

"That felt… incredible," I whispered, grinning ear to ear.

"You liked, huh?"

"Mmm hmmm…" I was in a dream state.

Joey was still lying on top of me, our heads side by side, breathing heavy, and our bodies sticky with pleasure.

"I feel kinda weird, but good too. Is that normal?" I asked.

"How the fuck would I know? I never sucked a dick before."

"You sure?" I joked.

"Screw you, farm boy. What the fuck you talking about, *am I sure*? Next time I'll bite your dick off if you're not more appreciative."

"Oh, don't you worry about me. I am super appreciative and if you give me a minute, I'll be ready to appreciate you some more," I growled.

He rolled off me and we reached for our clothes and anything we could wipe up with. We finished getting dressed, grinning like a couple of fools in the dark.

“I’m hungry,” he said, reaching for the snacks. “Pringle?” He tilted the tube of chips toward me and dumped a stack in my hands. He took a long swig of Mountain Dew, his favorite caffeine-abundant liquid.

“I love kissing you when you drink that,” I said out of the blue, gesturing at the bottle. He opened his arms wide, inviting me in for a kiss. He held me in his embrace as his tongue searched my mouth, apparently looking for a chip.

“Hey, calm down, quarterback. I’m already dressed.”

We laughed, snuggled, and fed our faces with Pringles, Hershey Kisses, and the Dew, as he liked to call it.

“Hey, Angel, not to be a buzzkill, but can we talk about something.”

“Sure, are you ok, are we good?” I felt a little butterfly take flight and decided to lay my head on his lap again.

“Nothing super serious, but I want to get something out in the open so we have an understanding between us,” he began. I knew what this was about.

“You don’t need to explain anything. It’s ok, Joey, I was wrong about Tate. I was just jealous and I’m over it, really I am.” I held the hand he had placed on my chest and looked up, sincere in my expression.

“I know you’re fine, you said that earlier, but this is important for me to get off my chest.” He squeezed my hand. “I love you. More than I think you believe, and more than anything or anyone. To be honest with you, I’m flat out crazy about you. I wake up every fucking day thinking about you, and then end every day, thinking about you. Everything good in my life is because of you, I hope you know that. You make me want to do everything better and to be a better person… for you.” He paused, and I noticed his eyes welling up.

“It’s ok, Joey, you don’t have to say this to me. Please don’t cry, I’ll hate myself.”

He continued, despite my plea. “Maybe you don’t understand

what it's like for me not having parents. Yeah… I know I have parents, but you know what I mean. They abandoned me, they just disappeared. Maybe they didn't love me, I don't know. I've never felt that I belonged anywhere or that I had someone just for me."

The dam was going to break, I knew it. All I could do was hold him and listen and be there for him.

"You're that for me. I don't mean that I own you or that you own me, it's more like we belong to each other because we love each other. I need that with you, Caleb. I never want to be without you by my side and I can't have you wondering if I could love anyone but you, because I fucking can't, it's not possible. I'd never do that to you… or to myself."

I smiled, absorbing his words.

"The way I felt today, losing you, that shit scared me. I can't be without you."

A tear left his eye and rivered down, coming to rest on his cheek. Using his thumb, he quickly wiped it away, knowing full well that it was far too late to erase the evidence.

"I want you, for my whole life." He struggled, squeaking out the last sentiment and began to weep. He was silently crying. I took him into my arms. He felt small when I pulled him into my chest, his head tucked down and his body curling into me. He was vulnerable, something I knew he was completely uncomfortable with. His painful childhood had taught him that being alone was a scary place to be. He'd never gotten over the pain and loneliness of the first few months of his parents' disappearance. The scared and lonely little boy in his aunt's trailer never left his mind. Sometimes I felt his six-year-old self inside me too. I wanted to protect that boy and I wanted to protect the eighteen-year-old Joey as well. I sometimes forgot that as confident and strong as he was, the little boy was still in there, frightened of being abandoned.

He released my hand and scooted down to lie back on the blanket beside me. I put an arm around his neck, encouraging him to nest inside. Our roles were reversed. He hesitated at first but found the strength of my protection comforting. He felt safe.

"Wow! Look at the stars, will ya? You can see the entire

universe from here," I said. I'd always been fascinated with space and other worlds. We used to lie in the tree house and count shooting stars and make wishes. Our wishes were always identical. He wished for his parents to come home, and I wished for the same. I told him I did it because I was doubling up on the energy to make it come true.

We continued gazing at the heavens, lying in silence.

"You think they're looking down at us?" he whispered, probably hoping for a shooting star and one more wish.

I knew he was thinking of his parents. "Truthfully, Joey, I hope not," I responded, reluctance in my voice. "I'd prefer to wish they're alive."

"You think that's even possible after all these years?"

"Anything is possible if you believe it to be. I like to think that our lives have endless possibilities and endless outcomes. Our universe has infinite versions, and I'm not saying that from a Christian standpoint either, in case you're wondering."

"It's been eleven years. I'm beginning to think that my parents aren't alive anymore. How can I move forward if they are alive, and I find out they abandoned me?"

I pressed my body closer to him. "I don't know Joey. On one hand, I want them to be alive and come back for you. On the other, I know they can't be alive because they wouldn't have abandoned you to begin with otherwise. I've been by your side for eleven years, spent time with your grands, I've heard their stories about your folks. Zero chance they would have just up and left you, that couldn't be possible."

He pulled my arm tighter around his neck. "Thank you, Angel."

"For?"

"For making me feel better and always reassuring me that my mom and dad wouldn't have abandoned me. You make me feel a whole bunch better when you say that."

"You're welcome. Oh, and one other thing before I forget to tell you. You'll have me for your whole life, and mine too," I added,

kissing the top of his head.

I didn't want to spoil the mood, but had a serious question cross my mind. "Can I ask you something?"

I pulled my arm out from under him and sat upright, crossing my legs, hands on my knees.

His face became serious, questioning the change in conversation. "Ok…"

"Let's just say that they didn't abandon you. Then what do you think could have happened? Have you ever asked your grands that question? Why would two perfectly happy and healthy people with a seven-year-old son just up and disappear? I don't get it, Joey. Doesn't make sense to me."

"I don't get it either."

"What about the cops? Surely someone had to be asking questions about them, dontcha think? Come on, think about it. You can't just have two people disappear off the face of the earth without someone asking questions about it?"

He reminded me that his grands had told him years ago that the police gave up after concluding there wasn't a crime scene, and no bodies ever recovered, or weapons found and no signs of foul play. Their disappearance had been filed away with many others as a cold case and that was that. His grandfather had his suspicions. He told him it was too much of a coincidence that his dad disappeared soon after he had voted *NO* on the resort that had since been built on the reservation land. He told me how his grandfather seldom spoke of this because he was concerned that he'd be admitting that they were, indeed, dead. Joey suspected that they were protecting him from that unknown reality. He stared at me blankly, stunned by something that had just crossed his mind.

"Hey, has that Alexander dude been bugging your parents to sell their farm?" he asked. "That fucker's called my grandpa and stopped by several times."

"Yeah, my father despises that man, why? Whatta you gettin at?"

“Didn’t you say that his fancy schmancy son dropped by your house and tried to give you a new bike? He’s the dude that ran you off the road, right?”

“Not exactly, he rescued me after I drove myself off the cliff. But you’re right, they have offered my folks a ton of money to sell the farm, but I’m still not getting you, Joey.”

“Alexander… Don’t you see the coincidence there? What company built the big resort out at Warm Springs, Caleb?”

I paused in thought, marinating on his question. He answered it before I had time to complete my train of thought.

“Alexander did! That’s who, and… now, who the fuck wants to buy our farms?”

He stared at me intently, as the possibility of what he was saying cemented itself into my brain.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: Landon

It'd been weeks since we'd come upon the Hollings kid with the Indian from the marina. I'd seen the Indian working at the marina for the past couple of summers. He fueled my boat a few times and I usually gave him a ten-dollar tip. The memory of our last contact flooded my brain.

"Thanks mister," he smiled and tossed the gas cap key back to me, "too generous dude, but thanks again!"

The disinterested stud walked away with a tank top tucked into the back pocket of his tight faded denim shorts, displaying a perfect athletic ass. The shorts held his round ass cheeks in a cradle of perfection. The kid was sexy as fuck, and he knew it. He possessed an aloof 'don't fuck with me air' I found hot. He wore his long black hair in a ponytail, halfway down a back that was lean and muscular. When he'd come up to me earlier on the dock I'd been taken aback by his looks. I'd never seen a guy so incredibly exotic looking. His Native ancestry had flattered his face with an amazing gift. Flawless structure, high cheek bones, and a mouth full of straight white teeth. Sex appeal oozed from every pore. At the time, the thought of him being into guys hadn't crossed my mind. He had a tough, slightly pissed off look about him. But to see him lying naked on top of the Hollings boy… "Fuck! That was hot as shit," I said out loud. I didn't tell Ronnie that I'd known who the guys were. How would I explain my innocent farm boy and another dude screwing in public?

My folks were at the Bend house for a visit so my dad could meet with his managers and some county employees about his project permits. He was in a foul mood, concerned that he was getting held up by the Hollings and Crow farms. They could lease him the land and the water rights or sell it outright. They were refusing to do either.

My dad looked up from his paper with a nasty look when I joined him after my shower.

"What?" I asked. "I didn't do it, whatever it is, pops."

He had a mean expression on his face and experience had taught me to tread lightly. He slammed his paper down and brought his recliner up with a solid bang.

"I'm sick of those fucking land rights liberals. Have you seen the shitty fucking press I'm getting on the Palisades project?" He crashed back in his chair and put his hands around his neck, demonstrating a remarkably on point and practiced choke hold. "This is what I'd like to do to that Hollings hick! Asshole's got his church and townfolks putting their noses in my shit by hosting a town hall tonight. Goddamned motherfuckers!"

"Landon! Honey! Please calm down, you know I hate that talk in my house," my mom scolded from the kitchen. She also knew, only too well, that engaging my dad further when he was in a tirade was ill advised. So, she kept it short and sweet while she plodded around her expensive kitchen. If her overpriced appliances were gleaming or steaming as she put it, she was happy as a pig in stink. I glanced at her as she gave me the 'don't push his buttons this morning, honey' look. We both knew what could happen if we offered an opinion. She handed me a fresh latte from her latest Italian gadget she'd had shipped to her from across the pond. The two-thousand-dollar machine made some fine coffee. I winked at her to let her know I was two steps ahead of her as far as heeding her warning about Mount Vesuvius in the living room.

"Junior, you're going to that fucking meeting tonight. I want to know what those pricks are up to. Got it?" It was an order disguised as a request. "Treat yourself and that gal friend of yours and take the 8-series. Buy her a nice dinner while you're in Madras if they have a nice place to eat in that shithole town." He pointed to his desk, my cue to grab his wallet so he could load me up with hundies. "I want those small-town hicks to see my son there in a hundred-thousand-dollar car. Show 'em how serious we are about getting what we want. I can't believe that old Indian Chief fuckwad ain't learned his lesson yet," he growled under his breath.

What the fuck did that mean?

"And I know you're gay and all, from the last report you gave, but Jesus H. Christ, why ain't you fucking that hotty friend of yours? That's a fine piece, son," he added, a gross grin spread across his mug.

Yuk! That man is my dad. I let that sit in my brain for a second.

I heard my mom slam down her coffee mug. “Landon Senior! That’s quite enough for this morning. You know I hate that vulgar talk.” She had reached her daily limit and it was only nine in the morning.

I grabbed my coffee and the bagel mom had toasted for me and headed back upstairs to shower and plan the rest of my day. Apparently, my dad had zero respect for my schedule and now I was forced to go to a country bumpkin church revival in Madras. I glanced out the giant window that lit the staircase from the morning sun just in time to see the maid arriving. Connie had been our housekeeper for years and was practically family. *Note to self: Ask to see any updated pics she might have of her college bound son Eric. That was a piece of ass I’d like to tap for sure.*

I texted Ronnie.

Me: I need a pretty lady on my arm tonight.

Text two.

Me: Sorry it’s business, not pleasure. Need you to look sexy as fuck tho!

I tossed the phone on my bed and headed for a shower. After that, I decided to head to the gym for a workout before my trip to Madras. I grabbed my gym bag and headed downstairs. Once in the kitchen, Connie smiled her big smile and asked if I’d eaten yet.

“Thanks Con, mom made me a bagel. How’s Eric? Any new photos of your pride and joy?” I inquired, needing a hit of morning stud.

“Oh yes, Junior, he’s in Hawaii on vacation. He sent me lots of beach pictures.”

Hawaii? Beach pics? Looked like I’d be late for the gym.

“I’m taking the 8, pops. It needs gas for later.”

I grabbed the keys from the hallway table, not waiting for an answer, and headed out the door. Another beautiful, sunny fall day in

Bend. The BMW was covered in dust from the graveled country roads. I decided to add one more thing to my growing list: stop by the car wash and have a couple of the hunks there give it a quick spruce job. That was always a great way to spend thirty minutes and thirty bucks of tip money. Had to keep my growing list of hot ass on the hook.

The sedan looked mean sitting in the drive. Clean or not, I loved driving it. I pulled out of the driveway and depressed the gas and felt the power as I headed into Bend. I got a glimpse of myself in the rearview mirror.

"You fine, Landon," I mouthed, licking my lips for extra effect. "Maybe today's the day." I thought about some warm lips wrapped around my cock for a change. I'd had enough of sucking off straight guys for a while. *Fuck! I need a hot man!* I slammed my fists on the steering wheel and could feel my chub growing in my sweats. *Today is the day*!

I rammed on the gas pedal and merged onto the freeway for the quick two miles to my exit. Even though it was October, we were having a nice week of weather. But the thing was, there could be a foot of snow tomorrow; that's the strangeness of living at an elevation over thirty-six hundred feet.

I took the exit, and then a right onto Miller road before entering the parking lot of the exclusive fitness club my folks were members of. I noticed a huge jacked up Chevy truck in the lot. It had a lift kit and oversized nubby tires, black with tinted windows. Bend was an up and coming, getting cooler, trendy town, but it had its share of rednecks and lug nuts.

What kind of douchebag drives a redneck rig and goes to a private club for old men and women?

While I searched for an open parking space, the door of the truck opened and the hottest piece of meat I'd seen in months stepped out. Well, stepped out isn't quite right, more like jumped down. *Juice much?* The lug nuts' muscles had muscles. But still, he was handsome in that square jaw, military sort of way.

I pulled into the only available space, which happened to be alongside his truck, and parked. He stood there and waited for me to exit my own car. *Uh-oh, here comes some macho bullshit. Did I park too close, did he hate yuppies, was he going to ask about my liberal politics?*

But instead, he smiled at me, surprising me with a friendly face. Maybe all wasn't lost, based on my preconceived notion about the Monster Truck Show I thought he was heading to.

"Nice BMW, man. Does it ride as nice as it looks?" he asked, side-eyeing me more than the car.

Was he still talking about the car, or did BMW stand for Bite My Weiner?

Good thing I showered. I had a sixth sense about sexual encounters and my Spidey sense was high. Not to mention, I had no doubt I was looking fly for sure, wearing a lightweight Nike windbreaker over a tight tank top and form-fitting runner's shorts that hugged my manhood in all the right places. We stood around the car and shot the breeze for a few minutes. The hot piece was seriously giving me the once-over. Seemed like fair game, so I decided I could play the eye bang game just as good as *Roid Man* could.

"I've never seen you here," he stated, sounding decidedly sincere in his disappointment. *I knew a pickup line when I heard one.*

"You're right; it was a busy summer. I'm just getting back into it. Doesn't look like you miss much," I replied, locking eyes with him before scanning down to the sweet spot. He puffed his chest out and leaned against his truck so I could further explore the thick tool in his shorts.

Dude had to be two hundred and thirty, at minimum, built like a linebacker. Huge chest straining against his tee with melon-sized biceps. I was ignoring the few folks walking by as they headed to their cars. One old broad had focused her bifocals on the mass of muscle as she strode by. *Hang it up granny, this stud is hunting fresh boy-ass today.*

You sure you wanna do this, Landon? It'd been a while since I'd been fucked, and this dude certainly looked hungry to pound. If the outline in his shorts was any indication, I'd better do my stretches. I'd already pegged him as a power top based on his gruff behavior and hungry fucking gazes at my ass. He broke the stalemate.

"So, how about a quick test ride in your bimmer? I left my lifting gloves back at my flat. It's only two blocks away. Can we swing over so I can grab them really quick? Kill two birds, one stone, sorta thing."

Ok, it was on for sure. Does one of the bird's death involve you choking on my cock? "Sure man, why not?" I said, gesturing toward the passenger door, inviting him to jump in. *I'm either dying today or getting some solid dick.* I could see at least an eight-incher, growing in his gym shorts. *This ought to be fun.*

The gym stud slid into the front seat. He had a huge body in every sense of the word. Everything about him was exaggerated. His legs were huge and had defined muscles. The trim waist was made to look even smaller by his massive chest and arms. I swore I'd seen him on a Marines recruiting poster. It was a good thing he had such a handsome boyish face because the rest of him looked… well, slightly… threatening.

"Take a right after the 76 station, second driveway on the left." He sounded like a drill sergeant. Fitting, considering he just may be drilling something in about fifteen minutes or so.

His flat was indeed just down the street in a fashionable part of Bend. The new trendy developments were popping up all over town. New tech money was moving in, and the outdoors lifestyle was attracting new residents every year. The newish building had all the modern cladding and multi-surfaces. Big windows and spacious high ceilings were visible on each unit. *So, let's count… hot, sexy, a few coins and a huge cock? Maybe marine stud was more than a gym pickup?*

We'd both been silent on the ride over except to occasionally give each other the once over and a smile of approval. He had me pull directly into his garage and had the door secured before I'd even put the car into park. A fancy fob on his keys allowed for seamless entry to his garage.

"How long you been here?"

"Bought it new last year after moving here from Seattle. I'm heading a new start up and we're basing ourselves here in Bend. Thanks for pulling in. I don't need the neighbors thinking I'm some big-ass ho bringing strangers home all the time."

"Well, do you?" I asked, not giving a rat's ass whether he did or didn't.

"Sure, a few. It's definitely been a busy streak. Don't worry

though, I'm always safe," he added.

"Good to hear uh… what's your name?"

"Not important, is it? I'm really just looking for some hot sex and you look like a guy that knows his way around an ass."

He gave me a direct yet questioning look. I hadn't expected the change of roles, it looked like I'd be the drill sergeant today, leading the way into battle. It certainly appeared there'd be a battle of the bulge.

His flat was modern and tastefully decorated. You could always count on a moneyed gay to have good taste. He had a couple of large sculptures placed strategically around the open and airy rooms. His taste in art was nice and it showed he spent money on it. Loads of wood, leather and metals were used on the materials for construction of the flat and his furnishings. He had an oversized coffee table with several bodybuilding magazines and a couple smut magazines too.

"Are we heading up to your bedroom to get the morning going?"

"No, we'll be heading back down to the garage level. I just need to grab some supplies."

He gave me a knowing grin and bounded up the second set of open stairs that must lead to his bedrooms. I wandered around the flat, admiring his taste when I heard steps behind me, descending the wood-wrapped stairs. Marine hunk had nothing on but a jock strap, carrying a fistful of condoms and lube.

He stopped for my approval and slowly turned around, giving me an insane view of his massive, muscular ass. "This work for you?"

"Fuck, dude, your body is off the chains, man. How'd you get so big?"

"You know, a little juice here and little more there." He touched his chest and then his arms, imitating a needle. Grabbing his massive ass cheeks and using his hands to lift each one, he said, "But these… these are all natural, baby."

I'd been right; he was on the juice. I didn't give a fuck though,

he looked amazing. The jock strap was bulging, it would indeed be a glorious battle.

I followed him as he headed back down the stairs. Walking behind him was a vision of male ass—a big, round, muscular ass that was also hard as a rock. The jockstrap barely contained the two massive cheeks, struggling to remain strapped in. I felt my own cock stirring in my gym shorts. He ducked his head to pass down into the hallway. There was another door that I'd seen across from the garage entry door when we'd arrived earlier. He grabbed the doorknob, pushing it open, and motioned for me to step inside.

The room was dimly lit, and cool trance music played in the background. I stood still for a moment, allowing my eyes time to catch up with the change in lighting. Once adjusted, I became aware of the surroundings, noticing a couple of couches in an L shape on one side of the room with some nice accent tables and a bar in the corner. The room was large even with the heavy furniture. A small table lamp gave off the only light, a scarf draped over for effect. The bar was supplied with a complete line of the best alcohol tech money could buy.

My eyes were drawn to the center of the room where I'd noticed something in the middle of the large open space. I hadn't seen it at first, its black color concealing it in the poorly lit room. The contraption was suspended from the ceiling, and underneath that on the carpet was a large and thick rubber mat. At first, I thought it was some modern looking chair or lounger hanging from chains. *These new moneyed techies liked their modern furnishings*. I felt him come up behind me.

"You like?" His growl startled me.

"What… the fuck is it?" I asked, my mouth hanging open, my eyes taking it in.

"It's what you're going to fuck the shit outta me on. Now let's get you out of those workout clothes, daddy."

Daddy? This would be a first for twenty-eight-year-old me. *Oh shit! Was I getting old?*

He moved me over to the couches and kneeled down to remove my shoes. I stood next to him and decided to let him serve me. Based

on his posture, he wanted me to take charge. After he'd removed my shoes and socks, he stood back up, towering over me but still acting compliant. I knew I'd be fucking him soon, but for now I'd let him drool over me for a while. He pulled my tank top over my head and began kissing my nipples, tossing the shirt on the floor. The guy was at least 4 inches taller and 70 pounds of muscle larger, but surprisingly he was gentle and moved lightly. He dropped to his knees and brought his mouth down to my stomach.

"I love a lean and not too muscular body. You're fucking hot, dude, and you smell delicious as fuck."

His fingers slid into the waistband of my shorts, and he slid them lower on my hips as he continued to lick my stomach. I had black Hugo Boss underwear on that seemed to get him hotter.

"Yummy bro, these briefs are fucking hot." He pressed his mouth against the outline that was still encased in my Hugo's and took a deep breath. "Fuuucckkk…" he moaned, exhaling a lung full of Landon dick air.

He slid my shorts and briefs down in one swift move past my knees, and let my cock flop out of the cage it'd been in. My dick was swelling fast, and my plum head was beginning to throb with anticipation. He placed his hands on me and pushed my hips back. I was forced to take a step back as he enjoyed the view. He lifted his face to mine and I noted the happy and hungry grin.

"It's fucking huge, dude. My man-hole is going to love this," he drooled, holding its semi-hardness in his palm.

His voice evaporated when his mouth opened, and I slid my cock deep into his throat. He had my cock fully down his throat, and his tongue was licking under my balls.

"Fuck, you like your cock. Don't ya boy?"

I grabbed the back of his head, not allowing him to answer. His head was secure in my grip, and I held it tight until I sensed the slightest gagging sound. It appeared that even he had limits. I grabbed him by the ears and jammed my dick deeper into his gagging mouth.

"Why don't you suck on that some more, you filthy little boy."

I knew muscle stud was a bottom and liked to be told what to do. He was the big roided out macho man on the streets, but a big power bottom in the sheets. I'd had a muscle queen or two in the past. He reminded me of a defensive back from my college years that had showed up at the fraternity one drunken night. After having four shots too many, he took my big dick, a bit too easy if memory serves me correctly.

I pulled my dick out of his mouth and turned around, so I could crawl up on the couch on all fours. "Eat my asshole out, you puny fucker. And I want that tongue deep in my ass while you fondle my nuts," I barked.

It was fun to call him puny; I knew he'd hate that. He looked like a five-year-old on Christmas morning after that order. He was on my ass with his mouth in two seconds, burying his face in my crack and tonguing the fuck outta my hole. It felt so fucking good. I was glad he had told me that I'd be fucking him, because his hot tongue in my ass was driving me crazy and I could use a good dicking myself. I reached back and held my ass cheeks apart, providing easier access for my new muscle boy toy.

"That's it stud, get your tongue in there deeper," I snarled.

I suddenly wished he'd had a ten-inch tongue and could breathe through his ears. I rolled over and sat back on the couch, spread my legs wide and pointed at my throbbing cock.

"Get that pretty mouth back on my cock, boy. I wanna be extra stiff when I fuck that muscled ass of yours."

He dropped back down on my cock and moaned as I fed him inch after inch of cock. He slobbered up and down my cock, holding my balls in his hand while moving his mouth like an expert, humming softly as my shaft went in and out. He stopped at the tip and flicked his tongue on my slit, driving me crazy. I knew I'd better think about filling his ass before I shot my load too soon. His head was so on point that I could've blown a load and walked, but decided I'd enjoy drilling his huge muscular ass far too much to leave.

"You want that cock in your ass, boy?"

"Yes, sir! Please, daddy," Macho Man begged.

"You need to earn the right to my cock, you scrawny fucker. Finger my ass while you're down there too."

Why not use him a little more. I lifted my ass off the couch for his thick fingers. I held my legs up by my ankles and spread my smooth hole wide for the hungry slut. He finger fucked me hard and swallowed every inch of my beef stick. The dude's mouth was a fucking Hoover, and he knew how to deep throat a dick. The pressure of his fingers on my prostate was driving me nuts, and I felt the first signs of shooting a load, so I grabbed the sides of his face and eased him off my cock.

"Where do you want my load, boy? Down your throat or in your other nasty hole?"

"In my tight hole, daddy. Can you tie me up in the sling and drill my tight ass hard, please, daddy?"

This guy was a fucking trip for sure. Big muscled stud and a begging bottom bitch once you got a dick in his mouth. I was going to fuck the shit outta his ass.

Muscles jumped up on his sling like an Olympic gymnast and laid on his back. I secured his feet into the leather straps hanging from the chains nearest me, and then went around to his head to tie his hands up at the top. Once I'd returned, he slid his muscled ass down toward me, his jock revealing his bare ass, while his cock was still wrapped in the mesh. I teased his hole with my fingers as I rubbed the huge mound of dick in his jock.

"You want daddy to let your tiny boy dick out, punk? You need daddy to release your puny dick?"

"Please sir. Let it out… I need daddy to put his dick in my butt."

His ab muscles were flexing as he moved in the sling, wriggling his ass and writhing in ecstasy. His hands were bound above him so he couldn't touch his own cock.

"You like daddy's hands on your dick? You want daddy to suck on it for ya?"

I teased him as my hands squeezed his junk. I pulled the mesh

aside and released his huge cock. He had precum leaking all over and his balls were huge and hanging down to his hole. I grabbed the lube and slathered up three fingers and began to move them over his asshole.

"This what you need?"

He shuddered and let out a gasp as my fingers gently pushed harder. I grabbed his cock with my other hand and slid the lube up and down his shaft. The first finger slipped inside his warm pucker, and he begged for more.

"Please fuck me, daddy, I need your cock in my ass now."

He spread his ass further apart, encouraging me to slip him my dick. "Not so fast, you little whore. Try practicing some patience, will ya? You're gonna get finger fucked first, and then *daddy* will decide if you deserve his dick or not," I scolded, slapping his balls hard.

"Yes, sir!" he moaned, grinning in anticipation. He was in heaven, eyes wide, living in his fantasy world.

As for me, I was digging the role-playing with this hunk of manhood. I'd never done this with such a manly marine type of stud. My normal sex life was basically vanilla and usually involved head and some anal, but never a sling, a marine and power bottom begging for my cock. My dick was throbbing and dripping precum all over as I slid a condom on and fisted it with a handful of lube. Muscle's eyes rolled into the back of his head as he anticipated my schlong coming up to his pucker. I slapped my thick cucumber sized piece against his hanging nuts and his eyes widened, awaiting the violation of his asshole.

"Oohhh…" he moaned. His anxious eyes glanced at mine and then back to his hungry hole, willing me to fuck him. I slapped my cock against his taint a few more times.

"You ready for daddy cock, boy? Your hole feels hungry, you little punk."

Muscles was frothing over me calling him punk and treating him like the piece of ass he was. I had a suspicion that he craved being put in his place when it came to sex.

“Fuck yeah, daddy, please, shove it in my ass.”

I pushed the plum head of my cock against his lubed hole and pressed until I felt his asshole relax around the head. I let it rest there for a moment until I felt him relax a bit more, and then, slammed into him in one deep plunge.

“Fuuuuuuuuckkkk!” he moaned, clenching his teeth. “Don’t stop daddy, fuck my ass harder.”

I pulled out slowly, leaving just my head in, and slammed deep into him again and then pounded his hungry hole over and over. Deep hard drives plunged into his muscled ass as he moaned louder and begged for more. My cock was buried deep in his ass as his muscled cheeks flexed and tightened, flexed and tightened again. He was gripping down on my dick so hard I felt him squeezing my tool and riding it like his life depended on it.

I had my hand around his fully erect cock throbbing and dripping cum as it got milked, while his hole was being plunged over and over. Picking up my pace, my balls slapped against his asshole, fucking him harder and deeper. His cock was swelling, and he turned his head back and forth while his eyes were indicating pure joy. My hand went up and down on his cock, keeping time with the rhythm of my cock plowing into him.

“I’m going to cum, daddy!” he whimpered.

His body was bucking as he clamped down on my cock. The sling was obviously bolted well to a reinforced ceiling because this muscle queen was writhing like he was on fire. I shoved my cock harder into him, ramming his ass as hard as I could and stroked his dick at the same time. Feeling my balls constrict, I knew I’d be filling a condom full of cum into his stretched-out hole.

“Fuck it! Fuck it! Fuck my box harder, daddy!” he yelled, as his cock bulged, and his asshole continued to clamp down on me.

He was milking a load out of me, and I was milking his cock. “Get ready for daddy’s load, boy. It’ll be… it’ll be… here it comes… punk. Fuuucckkk!”

I felt my load blasting out of my nut sack and up through the shaft of my cock. Shuddering from release, I pumped my load into his

hungry hole, draining my dick. His heavy moaning gave a heads up about the pulsing blasts of cum shooting from his cock. He struggled, tensing in pleasure against the chains and leather straps of the sling, strained to their limit, supporting his massive body.

His eyes rolled back in his head. “Holy fuck, Sarge! Fuuucckkk… I’m shooting, dude. Ohhh my fucking god.” He was flailing wildly. *I fucking hope this sling holds.* “Yeesss… yeesss… fuuucckkk yeesss!” He collapsed onto his suspended pleasure throne, breathing hard.

My cock flopped out of his worn-out asshole as I grabbed his balls and gave them one last squeeze. “Fuckin-A dude! That was awesome.” He lay there grinning at me. “The moment I saw you, I thought you looked like an arrogant prick, sitting in your pricey ride. I figured you’d be a cocky asshole of a fuck, and you didn’t disappoint. You’re a great fuck, dude. Thanks for the hot scene.”

“Wow. Sure, no problem. Was that a compliment?”

“Totally man. Sorry about the arrogant comment, but usually your kind of guys are great fucks. It’s like you have something to prove, and I was right, you definitely proved to be a great fuck. I loved your huge cock in my ass, dude.”

I peeled off my full condom and tucked it in his jock strap for effect.

“That was definitely wild, dude. One of the best experiences I’ve had in this town. I’d be happy to fuck your hungry ass anytime.”

He grinned. “By the way, my name is Frank.”

He offered me a shower, which I accepted, and I was out of there in under an hour. I skipped my workout. Wrestling Frank’s huge thighs was all the workout I needed.

CHAPTER TWENTY: Joey

Grandpa whistled for me as soon as I stepped out of my car. I'd seen him working on something near gram's greenhouse when I pulled in, so I headed over to check it out.

Gram's outline was visible through the small kitchen window as she busied herself around the kitchen. Even though the old house was closed tight as a frog's ass, I could smell something delicious leaking through the small cracks, giving its delicious secrets an escape route.

"Give me a hand, son. Your gram needs this plastic draped over the top of the greenhouse to prevent leaks, and I can't hold all four corners." He had a huge clear tarp in his hands. "Take those two corners and walk around to the other side," he instructed.

The old greenhouse had seen better days, but gram was tickled she could grow veggies later in the year than most. She also had a half-acre of land alongside it for her field vegetables that had long since been tilled under.

It'd been a grueling practice at school and the team was on edge about the upcoming Homecoming game. We had Redmond High on the schedule for the second time, all of us knew what a battle that'd be. They were leading our division by a game, and it wasn't a secret that they had a running back who had the speed of a goddamned gazelle. Word around the locker room was Alabama had him locked down as their star recruit.

"How was practice today?"

He was flapping his arms up and down trying to get the creases in the tarp out as I walked backward, stretching it out at the same time.

"Good."

I looked behind me, careful not to trip on something in the twilight creeping across the yard.

“Good? That’s all I get outta ya today?” he questioned. “You eat me outta house and home, and all I get is one-word answers, boy? I guess gram and I will have to eat alone tonight,” he joked.

“Sorry gramps, got tons on my mind.”

“Football, or something a little more serious?” he paused before adding. “Caleb and you doing, ok?” he asked.

I loved that he was able to talk about my relationship.

“It’s not Caleb, gramps, and it’s not entirely football either,” I grudgingly admitted.

“Let’s pull this over the top and then we can see what’s crawled up your backside.”

I lifted the tarp up over the roof edges and he pulled it tight as I grabbed the ladder standing against the barn.

“Well, one of us got some smarts,” he said, after I retrieved the ladder.

We drove small brad nails along the seams and into the wooden frame of the greenhouse, securing it for the harsh winter that was right around the corner.

“Come help me cut the lights off and secure the barn doors. That’ll give us a minute to catch up on what’s on your mind, Joey.”

He headed for the giant door, and I glanced back at the kitchen window in time to see gram watching us. She smiled at me, wiping her wet hands before giving me a welcome home wave.

My grandparents were the rocks in my life. They’d been there for me when my entire world fell apart and they loved me unconditionally. It couldn’t have been easy to have reached their retirement years, only to find themselves with a six-year-old boy to raise. To make matters worse, they’d lost their only son, and that must’ve been a spirit extinguisher for anyone. I only remember bits and pieces of how my grands were with my father, but I knew they

loved him fiercely. Grandpa was proud of his success, and proud he'd gone to college, the only one in our long family history.

Gram would sometimes pause mid-sentence while speaking to me, a tear in her eyes. "You look just like your father, Joey. You both have that same dimple and high cheek bones. So handsome."

"Gram! Everyone in our family has high cheek bones."

"True, you're right, but you and your daddy, you're the most handsome of 'em all. Don't you ever forget that." She closed her eyes for a moment, and I knew she was pulling up an image of my dad from her memories.

"Coke?" Grandpa asked.

He kept a small fridge in the barn for when he was wood-working or hiding from gram and her *honey-do lists*. I nodded yes, and he tossed me one, pointing to the old cream can for me to have a seat. He scooted across the dirt floor, looking tired and old. I'd begun noticing a slower gait and some pain as he bent over or moved too quickly. We sat across from each other, and silence filled the space.

My attention was diverted when I heard a familiar squeal from the loft above. "I guess Killer nabbed another mouse," I mused.

Grandpa nodded his head in acknowledgment. We had the best barn cat in the county. He was an ugly fucker, but boy what a mouser.

"Ok kiddo, what's on your mind?"

Darn, I'd hoped maybe I could get out of this tonight. He gazed at me with his 'you're not getting out this, kid' gaze. He knew me so damn well, and yet I wasn't sure why I hesitated to spill my guts.

"Well…" I began, "It is sort of… about Caleb."

"I knew it."

"No, you didn't! Nothing bad or anything like that. We're doing fine, I'll have you know, so you can calm down about that. I haven't screwed that up, gramps."

"Best not, boy. That Hollings boy is a keeper. Your gram will

kick your behind if you ruin that. Spill it already, I'm hungry!"

"You and I've spoken about this in the past."

His face took on a serious look. "What have you done?" he asked sternly.

"I ain't done shit, geesh, I promise… this is about dad."

"And what about your dad?" He brought his hand to his chin in concern.

I started again. "Caleb asked me a fairly obvious question. It's about mom and dad and I didn't know how to answer him." I paused, making sure he wasn't pissed that I was bringing this up. "He was asking how it was possible that they could've just disappeared, and no one seems to know anything about it."

"And?"

"And… why has everyone, including the cops, stopped looking for them or stopped trying to figure out where they are?"

His head fell forward, his eyes paying careful attention to his hands while he thought about his next words. He struggled trying to answer me, not sure how much he should reveal.

"You think they are dead, don't you?" I quietly asked.

There was no hiding the shadow that hauntingly crossed his face. I'd seen this look many times regarding my dad and his whereabouts. He stood and crossed the dirt floor, heading to the open barn door, and closed it.. There was a sliver of dark sky where the doors didn't meet in the middle. I watched as he trudged back to the sawhorse he'd been sitting on. I felt fear grip my heart, knowing that he may be about to tell me something that I now wished I could avoid knowing.

"Sadly, son, I do think your parents are dead. Don't tell gram I spoke with you about this. She'll never be ready to hear those words until she has proof. She'd skin my hide if she knew we were talking about it without her." My eyes glassed over; he'd never admitted this to me before. "Your folks would never have left you, boy. I know that with all my might. Nobody loved you more than your parents did. It's

just not possible." He gave a minute for that to sink in. "What's Caleb's concern? What's got that fine boy worried? Is he worried about you, or about us?"

I knew how gramps felt about Caleb. I was confident he didn't think that Caleb was trying to stir some shit up or anything like that. "He's just responding to me and my sadness, I suppose." I stared at my feet, counting the gravel pieces from the driveway that had mixed in with the dirt.

"He loves you, Joey, of course he's concerned." He lifted his gaze at me, narrowing his eyes. "What's your real question?"

"Why hasn't anything been done about it? Come on, grandpa, it's been over ten years, and you and gram don't even speak about it. I just wanna know why, where and who… I… need… I just… wished I had answers." I kicked a large piece of gravel across the dirt floor, pissed that I was choking up. "I need to know if they abandoned me or something else happened."

Grandpa huffed. He always hated my comments about being abandoned. "Nobody abandoned you. Period. End of story. And you will not say that again in mine, or your gram's presence. Understood?"

"Yes sir," I mumbled, picking a piece of lint off my jacket.

"Listen, boy, you're a grown man now and it's time I give it to you straight. Until evidence such as a body surfaces, we got nothing. I ain't forgot nothing either, and you know damn well that gram hasn't forgotten her beloved boy. Maybe we should've kept you more in the loop, but she worries about you so much. You're eighteen, so you might as well understand what we're dealing with here." He glanced toward the door making sure gram hadn't snuck out to check on her men. "We got our suspicions, trust me on that. Your gram calls the Sheriff every single month. Every single goddamned month she is on their asses. It's been over ten years and she hasn't missed her monthly call one single time." He was riled up now. I may have opened a can of murder hornets. "You have your right to ask questions, and Caleb is kind to inquire about your wellbeing. I respect that boy even more for caring so much about you that he worries about this stuff."

"Alexander."

"What about Alexander?" he stared wide-eyed across the room,

dread in his eyes.

“Those assholes killed my parents!” I growled in a low whisper.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: Landon

While I'd been fucking Frank, Ronnie had confirmed her acceptance for my invite. I'd just completed my third shower for the day. Number two was after drilling Frank in his fucking sling. *I hate the name Frank!* What a shitload of false advertisement, rolling out of your big truck with all those muscles, and then having helium heels.

I laid out a pair of pressed jeans and a nice blue blazer.

"Junior, your shirt is hanging on the door, son. Wear nice shoes too. Listen to your father, look nice dear," mom singsonged.

A crisp white button up was hanging on the door where she'd hung it after ironing it for me. I got dressed and sent Ronnie a quick text.

Me: On my way, 5 minutes.

Ronnie lived three miles south of my folk's place. She'd rented a place in a new complex off the highway. "The rental is just a pit stop, six months tops, I'll buy something soon," she'd said three years ago.

Her work with the county kept her busy. Bend was growing in the good economy and loads of people were building, including my dad. Ronnie knew all the ins and outs of permits and land use rights as well as water rights. My old man had used my friendship with her to bounce ideas, questions and shortcut possibilities. He loved having someone that came with inside knowledge.

"I swear Lannie, your dad is a sneaky fucker. He emails me all the time, trying to get inside info on the water regulations and whether I see any loopholes in the laws. He calls the loopholes 'his little permission slips to proceed.' Between you and me, I think your dad tried to bribe me last week. He said he'd make it worth my while to send him some zoning files that the county has on those two farms he wants to buy. That shit isn't

public, Landon. What the fuck?"

"Calm down, don't get your panties in a bunch. He's a business guy, Ronnie; it's his nature." I downplayed, knowing full well what my old man was capable of.

I honked twice and waited for Ronnie.

She opened the passenger door. "Girlfriend!" I cried. "You look like a million bucks!" She slid into the passenger seat. "You smell even better," I said.

"It's called Happy by Clinique, you like?" She held her wrist out to me as I inhaled deeply.

"Oh girl, do I ever. If I hadn't fucked a gym rat earlier, I'd do your sexy ass."

I always amped up my gay factor by twentyfold around Veronica. I hated that about her, especially if we were cruising for victims and I worried that I might appear too gay. *Can anyone really be too gay though? Really?*

"What was his name?" she asked. "Let me belt up and don't you dare leave a single detail out. Was he yummy?"

We'd had a 40-mile drive to Madras ahead of us and I promised to share every lurid detail I could remember. There were no secrets between us. We'd laughed our asses off about macho gay guys with their costumes, and how you could never read a queen these days.

Ronnie had been flirting with the foreman at a new job site she'd been inspecting. "Married but delicious, I should know better."

I was just about to inquire his dick size when the car chimed a warning. *Low pressure* was illuminated on the dash warning system. *Shit! I hope I didn't run over a nail earlier*.

My rescue, a full-service gas station, was a block ahead on the right. We'd just arrived in Madras, a town populated by seven thousand people. It was a pit stop of a town between Bend and Portland, Oregon. It sat below Mt. Hood and had all the necessary things a weary traveler or skier might need as they drove through. 'Blink and you might miss it' is how I described the small town. Nice

enough farm folk lived there, and the Cove Palisades State Park was a few miles south of town. My dad's next big project was planned overlooking the park, above the river. The past several trips through town, I'd noticed several new national fast-food chains on the main road through town. The calling card that the small-town vibe would soon disappear.

The 8-series purred into the station and proved yet again to be a head turner. You don't see hundred-thousand-dollar cars come to town that often. Folks in these parts only spent that amount on a house or a giant tractor. I guided the car under the carport built over the entire station and hopped out to inspect the rear right tire as the warning had specified. As I got around to the other side, I noticed Caleb Hollings sitting in a Jeep across from me. He had his window down as he waited for the gas attendant to finish pumping his gas. In Oregon, you can't pump your own gas. The state government's idea being that it provides jobs and helps Oregon's economy.

I watched as his attendant finished up, figuring he would help me next. Too bad Ronnie was with me because I would've offered to smoke the sexy attendant out with my grade-A weed, possibly even a complimentary BJ.

I decided to say hi to Caleb instead. I walked over and cleared my throat to give him some heads up.

"Hey, Mr. Alexander. What brings you to town?"

Uber polite, as usual. However, I wasn't a hundred percent sold on the Mother Teresa act. I had a bit more information on our young Hollings boy since our last tete-e-tete.

"I'm heading to a meeting at some stupid local church nearby."

"Oh yeah? You mean the meeting at the Baptist Church? That's my family's church."

He ignored my jab. *Shit, he really was that polite.* He looked me up and down. "You look nice, sir. They'll be happy to make your acquaintance, looking like that and all." He glanced at my chic outfit.

Was this Mayberry, fucking… something, whatever this town was called, from some 1950s TV show? Or did this kid just shade my ass?

“Thank you, Caleb. Hey, I’ve got the 8-series tonight. I know you’re crazy about BMWs.”

He was half out of his Jeep before I finished my sentence. The adorable farm boy was fully amazed and in a purple haze as he strolled over to the sleek car, gleaming under the artificial station lights. I knew the kid had never experienced any kind of purple haze, not church boy Hollings, I was certain about that fact.

“Wow!” he sighed. “Unreal to see one sitting right here in Madras.” He turned back to me. “It’s a beauty, sir.” His eyes were wide, and he looked like he had just seen Angelina Jolie or something.

Speaking of an Angelina look-alike, he noticed Ronnie and politely grabbed the edge of his baseball cap, tipping his head in acknowledgment. *This isn’t an act.* The realization made me want to suck his cock even more.

Ronnie rolled her window down. “Hello young man, I’m Veronica,” she purred offering a limp hand.

He looked at her hand, and then his own. “I’m Caleb, ma’am, and I’m so sorry, but I’ve been working under the hood of my vehicle, my hands are dirty.” He pointed to his Jeep behind him, and then stuck his hands into the pockets of jeans that appeared to have been painted on.

“That’s quite alright, dear. So, tell me, do you live near that cove Landon is yakking about all the time?” Her majestic tone had him in a trance.

“Well, yes ma’am, I do. Have we met before?” He sounded astonished by the line of questioning.

“Do you like to ride bikes?” Ronnie dragged her hand slowly along the edge of the door, where the window disappeared.

“That’s quite enough, Veronica.” I stepped forward and touched her arm as if to say *quit being a bitch to the kid.*

“Caleb?” she began again, ignoring my plea. “So, that’s your Jeep over there?” She raised a shiny lacquered nail and pointed at his vehicle. “It’s… so manly. Does your girlfriend like such a big… rig?”

I knew she had figured out who my crush was, and she was doing research for me to see if he was gay. She hadn't put together that this was the same guy we'd seen on the rock.

"No ma'am, I don't have a girlfriend."

Ronnie feigned shock. "No way!" She turned to me, smiling, and then back to her victim. "A gorgeous hunk of boy like you? No girlfriend? Well, it seems I've arrived just in time, Landon." She glanced at me again from her throne, enjoying the cat and mouse game.

Standing there, watching the exchange, I realized what an idiot I was. Just because Caleb liked guys, it didn't mean he wasn't the same polite and sweet young man I'd met earlier in the summer. I felt like shit, watching the deer walk into the slaughter. The kid was not only flat out fucking beautiful, but he was also kind and innocent. I'd accepted that I was an asshole a long time ago, but even I had my limits, and this kid deserved a hell of a lot better than what I could offer. But Christ, he was so hot. *Fuck! Here I go again.*

The gas attendant came over to us and handed Caleb his debit card. "It's full. Is Joey stopping by tonight? I wanna ask him about Friday's game."

"I'm not sure, I've got a meeting and he's still at practice."

Fuck me! Does hickville grow these kinds of hot asses on a regular basis, or what? I stared at the two guys, side by side, looking like delicious pieces of farm town meat.

"Gotta run, Mr. Alexander," Caleb said, turning to his Jeep.

I addressed the attendant, whom we'll call 'beef plate combo #2.' "Can you check the pressure on the right rear tire?"

"Sure thing, boss, any gas?" Combo #2 was taking a long, hard look at Veronica, sitting grandly in the car. She was leaning back, dreamily taking in all the young man meat.

"No, car's full. Just the tire please."

"Hey, Caleb!" I shouted after him as he was about to hop in his

Jeep.

"Sir?"

"Please, buddy, you're killing me with the sir business."

"I'm sorry, sir, it's just my upbringing and all. Besides, sir, you look so fancy, you and your lady friend all dressed up for the church meeting. I can't help myself," he said, once again, dripping with sincerity.

"So, Caleb, I was wondering, would you like to drive my dad's car sometime?" It came out before I knew I'd wanted to say it. *Jesus, I must look like an idiot.*

His face lit up. "Of course I would, sir, but that's kinda scary for me to even think about. I'm crazy about the car, for sure." He paused a second. "You know what, sir? I'll be seeing you at church tonight, ask me again." He tipped his hat one more time to Ronnie and pulled himself up and into his Jeep, his amazing Wrangler-clad ass giving me one more glorious view when he slid into the seat. He turned back to me. "She's a keeper, sir," he said, nodding at Ronnie. I stood there under the bright gas station lights and watched as he drove out into traffic. I'd never wanted to be a teenager more than I did at that precise moment.

The other hot kid who I had determined was named Chad from the letters stitched into his jacket, had put some air in the low tire and checked the others for me as well. He waited for me to check the dashboard to see if it had reset yet.

"Looks great, Chad." I slipped him a twenty.

"No, sir, no charge for the air," he said, backing away and holding up his hands, saying *no*.

"Keep it, it's for you, handsome," I said, giving him a knowing wink and then tilting my gaze down, looking directly at his well-worn jeans bulge. The look on his face was priceless. It took a full second or two, but his facial expression finally caught up with his tiny brain, and then, *voila*, straight boy understood my meaning. I grinned a shitty and devious grin and lifted my brows suggestively. He got my inference, no doubt about it. It couldn't hurt to grease the stud's palms. You never knew when I might need some more air and he

might need some weed and / or some excellent head.

I slid back into the car to Ronnie all slutty. “Well, well, well, so that’s farm boy,” she said having in fact figured it out. “You’re right about one thing—that delicious specimen is no boy, but please, Landon, leave the innocent boy alone.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: Caleb

The smile on Joey's face was evident even from the bleachers. He was happy to see me watching his practice. I had some time to kill before heading over to church for the meeting.

My father wanted me to attend the boring meeting. He was rather insistent at breakfast.

"It'll do you good, son. You can talk to the other families that are as concerned as your mother and I about the big resort proposal. Then maybe you'll understand why I wasn't so welcoming to Mr. Alexander's son." His words made it seem like the offer was optional, but I knew better. As my mother scooped up my plate, she gave me a look that said, 'please go support your father.' Message received.

Sitting in the bleachers, watching Joey, I sensed something was off about him. His rhythm was all wrong, and he wasn't going through his counts correctly. He threw an interception directly into the chest of the defensive back, apparently not seeing him roll out of his position back to the ball. Stuff like that happens on a football field, but it was unusual for him to completely miss the check-off against his defense. I'd spent plenty of time over the years running drills and catching passes from Joey and I knew what he was capable of and I sure as heck knew the plays.

I spotted the intended receiver, backup quarterback Jaylen Ross, shaking his head in disgust as he walked back into the huddle to ready for the next play, but some additional words must have been exchanged because suddenly he was in Jaylen's face, tapping his chest with his left fist and pushing him backward. He had his throwing arm cocked back like he wanted to take a swing at him. The coach and a few players were trying to pull him back; I didn't need to read lips to make out what pleasantries Joey was sharing with Jaylen.

"My money's on Crow," one of the freshman, acne-faced Kolt Lotts, hollered.

“Bullshit, man! Ross can take Crow, he’s just not had his shot yet this year.”

I was surprised to hear one of Joey’s buddies make that statement. I’d be keeping my eye on that traitor. The coach’s whistle was still blaring and Joey skulked back to the line of scrimmage.

It was no secret that Jaylen was disappointed after Joey was named starter. The entire school knew it, and Jaylen made no secret of his desire to knock Joey off his game. He played as a wide receiver for most of the games; his only quarterback playing time had been coming in as clean up after victory was secured. After last week’s loss, Jaylen had been in several other players’ ears about Joey. From where I was sitting, it looked like Joey had reached his limit. I watched as the dust settled and practice returned to normal. I waited until I saw him glance up to check on me, and I gave him a thumbs up and waved a goodbye. Joey discreetly placed his hand on his heart after returning my wave and my face lit up like a Macy’s Day Parade.

“Glad it’s not me sitting through that crap. Grandpa will be there too, be sure to say hello. He likes you, you know, the path and all,” he joked.

Our church was one of several in town and looked like the typical Baptist Church. It was white with a small steeple on top and had a large stained-glass window that old Mrs. Hallahan had donated after her husband suffered an untimely death from a wrestling match with a combine two summers ago. She came every Sunday. I’d watch her staring at the window, clutching her pearls, remembering her dear departed husband. The latest gossip according to my mother who, of course, denied ever gossiping due to its sinful nature, was that Mrs. Hallahan had been keeping the company of the owner of the town’s bakery. Mr. Gerhard was not a churchgoing man, so tongues were wagging. I suddenly felt the need to stop by Gerhard’s and get some of the bear claws that Joey and I loved so much. Might as well support another deviant in the community. Us sinners needed to stick together.

I steered the Jeep into the church parking just as Landon Alexander and his girlfriend were stepping out of his fancy car. The duo looked like royalty had decided to grace our town for the evening. Veronica was a stunner, no doubt about it. I wished I’d arrived first so I could have positioned myself at the right spot in the church pews.

This was going to be a show when she walked in.

I looked around the church's gravel lot; there was a spot beside my father's truck. When I arrived at the church lobby, Landon and Veronica were in the middle of a conversation with people they probably knew. I assumed it was city or county folk because they too were dressed in fancy city suits and polished shoes.

I grabbed a perfect aisle seat in back of the room, close to the exit to enjoy the runway show. The other bonus—I could be out if things got super boring.

Right on cue, Veronica entered. One of the suits stumbled on the carpeted edge and dropped his fancy briefcase to the floor. The sound was loud enough to get the entire room to turn in unison. I knew that was my cue to turn back to the front of the church, away from the commotion, and into the crowd in front of me lined up in their pews. All the other suits paused for the man that tripped, so he could regain his composure. Once he had his briefcase secured, they all parted to the side for a gentleman's pause, allowing Veronica to sweep into the church. I turned my head like a pivot on a sprinkler, from side to side—crowd, Veronica's entry, crowd, Veronica's entry.

And sweep, she did. She had on a black dress that appeared to have been sewn onto her. The length was designed to be almost inappropriate. The expensive piece of cloth hugged every perfect curve she had. Her shoes, black as well, with at least six-inch heels had the slimmest straps, exposing each foot. She was blessed with long legs, and the distance from the hem to her toes was a long journey. Each leg was elegantly covered in sheer black nylons. Her hair was up with loose ringlets hanging beside high cheek bones. Each ringlet set in an exact way, accentuating her extraordinary features. Large, round eyes, a pouty-lipped mouth covered in deep red lipstick, makeup tastefully underapplied. She had the kind of face that had launched many ladies' magazines. All eyes were glued on her and the handsome man who's arm she graced. Adding Landon to the total look was like watching Hollywood right there in our tiny little podunk town.

I heard every church lady, most I've known my whole life, clear their throats. They cast casual side glances at each other, and then quickly back to their husbands to make sure they weren't staring at the presumed abomination. I sat back and enjoyed the wave of similar looks, row after row, as Veronica moved elegantly down the aisle. It was obvious from her confidence this was not her first rodeo.

The meeting *was* boring. Townsfolk arguing about ruining our small-town feel, and business types trying to reassure every one of the big gains in tax revenues and new tourists coming in and spending money. The elected officials bragged about land prices increasing and how everyone would benefit from that.

My father had heard enough and stood up. “Higher land values mean the city and county can reassess us, and then charge us more property taxes,” he pointed out. “Most of us folks don’t sell our land, we hand it down.”

“Yeah! Hollings is right,” some people yelled. My father sat back down feeling renewed by the support.

Landon Alexander rose and cleared his throat. “Yes, Mr. Hollings, you are correct about assessments and possible higher taxes. However, sir, many of your neighbors are going to reap the benefits of those prices when selling their land to my family.”

From the look on his face, it was unlikely that my father had been told that a few farmers were willing to sell their land to the Alexanders. He stood back up, woefully looking around the room. “You are selling to these people?” he asked. “I thought we were united in our desire to preserve our farms?” I could sense the disappointment. My heart broke, watching my him look from friend to friend with questioning eyes. “Well then, I guess we aren’t as united as I’d hoped.”

I looked from him to Landon. This wasn’t what my father had wanted me to see. I felt overwhelmed at watching him so distraught. My heart ached at the deceit I was witnessing. He had the saddest, most defeated look on his face, and I’d never seen him appear so pained. I felt anger building in me when I observed so many of our friends and church families sitting on their hands, ignoring his sorrow. He returned to his seat and kept his head down.

The need to stand up for my father was too much for me. “My father will never sell our farm!” I yelled at no one in particular.

The anger built inside me, and I’d never felt such a need to defend my father. I loved this man and he had been betrayed. “Why is it always about money these days?” I raged. I scanned the faces of the attendees. “I grew up on our farm. My father’s father grew up on our

land. I want that land one day for myself and for my family." I noticed Landon watching me with a concerned look on his face. "And you, Mr. Alexander." My finger shook with nerves as I pointed directly at him. "You don't care about these families. You show up with your fancy friends in your fancy suits and your expensive cars, throwing your money around like a bunch of hotshots."

I knew my voice was going to crack; it always did when my throat tightened up. I was getting angrier. "We are all hardworking folk, sir, and I'm going to apologize ahead of time for what I am about to say." I looked Landon directly in the face, lowered my voice, and found my calm. "You, sir, are not getting my fucking farm!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: Joey

"Dude, you should have seen him. I didn't know he even knew the word 'fuck!'" Mike Jenkins said to me.

"The look on those old biddies faces, Joey, you shoulda seen Mr. Clean here, he lost his shit and told those assholes off. Fucking sweet man!" Pete added, high-fiving Caleb for what must have been the twentieth time. Caleb being Caleb, shyly shrugged it off and tried to change the topic.

My boyfriend was now a minor celebrity at school. The *meeting* as it was now known, was all the school could talk about. Many of the students had been at the church. My sweet Caleb had lost his shit was how the story went. He'd made himself a spectacle and I was about to add to it.

The last game had not been good news for me or for my team. I threw an interception into the end zone with three seconds to go and lost the game. That made it two losses in a row for our team. Major asshole, Jaylen Ross, had been lighting me up ever since. First in the locker room and then during practice. Spouting bullshit that he could've made the pass, or at least run it in for the score. In the locker room, there was more of the same. I was sitting on a bench on one side of lockers that ran down the middle of the room. Separated by lockers didn't mean I couldn't hear him holding court on the other side though.

"He loses the next game, Coach will bench him for sure. It won't be too late for me to get us into the playoffs if you guys step it up."

"Hey, fuck nuts! I can hear you, asshole," I yelled. "What else you got to say, Ross? Your freshmen boy's impressed by you yet?"

"Fuck you, Crow! Maybe if you spent less time jacking off with your farm boy, you'd focus on a man's game."

I walked around the corner and the younger players backed away from Ross. "You got something you'd like to ask me, num-nuts?" I placed my chin right in his face and glanced down at his crotch. "You got some desires in that tiny jock of yours you'd like to explore?"

He took a step back from me, not sure if he wanted to try me on or not. "It's just that…" Ross was flustered and trying to act tough. "Maybe if you spent less time looking at the bleachers to see if your lover was there worshipping you, you'd play some decent ball," he said, feeling proud that he'd been so clever for his audience. Mike Logan snickered at Ross's last comment. I turned his way to let him know I'd be revisiting his Benedict Arnold ass soon enough. He slouched behind one of Ross's other goons.

"You got a problem with what I do in my personal life, Ross? Cause if you do, I don't give a fuck, you punk!"

"It's not right, Crow. You know that shit's not normal. Everybody at school knows it's not right. They're all talking shit about this weird thing you and Hollings have. I don't get it man; you can have any chick in this school, and you want that church-boy loser?"

That was the last word to come out of his mouth for a couple of painful days. I was standing over his weak ass while he recoiled on the floor as he held his jaw, and I had a hold of his jersey, ice running through my veins. "You done yakking yet, fucker? Go ahead, say one more thing about Caleb, or come within an inch of my boyfriend, and I'll fucking kill you, Ross. You got that?"

As it turned out, suspension sucked. Coach had shown up just in time to see Ross blubbering on the floor. I'd swung first, and last, so naturally I took the fall. Coach hauled my ass into his office and asked for the rundown on what happened.

"I ain't taking his shit anymore, Coach," I sputtered. "He's chirping behind my back nonstop, pointing out every error I make on the field. It ain't right. If he wants my starting position, then let him earn it."

"I get it, son, but you broke the rules. You know I gotta suspend you from the team. We are both lucky we are at the stadium and the fight didn't happen inside the school, so I'll get around that part," he said. "One week, Crow. You won't be suiting up this Friday, Captain."

"Sorry, Coach," I mumbled, my head down.

"Well, at least we'll see how Ross runs the game? Won't we?" Coach said, with a shit-eating grin.

I was in school but suspended from the field. No practice, no games. I knew Coach had pulled some strings to get me to play the Homecoming game in two weeks. At least I could try to redeem the Redmond High loss we'd suffered earlier. We were tied in our division at 5-2. Homecoming would be huge in deciding what school got to districts.

The buzz in the school hallways was bigger than usual as the story got told and retold. However, the ending of the fight was always the same. I kicked Ross's ass. Of course, the big story was the retelling of my statement that Caleb Hollings was my boyfriend. I could tell from the stares in the halls and in class that students were trying to see if I had any plans on confirming the big headline. I traipsed through the halls, hearing the whispers, and noticed the head bobs.

After school, I met Caleb at his Jeep; he'd heard everything. He climbed in and shrugged exhaustedly. "You actually called me your boyfriend in the locker room in front of the team? You think that was wise?"

"Probably not. You are my boyfriend though, right?" I asked.

"Yeah, of course, but still."

"I'm done giving two shits about what everyone has known for years. I've got zero shits to prove at this school and I ain't fucking hiding anymore. I'm a senior for fuck's sake! Screw 'em!" I took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, but fuck it! I'm done hiding. I don't need those fuckers' approval."

Caleb placed a hand on my shoulder. "I get it, Joey, but what about the kids that go to my church? You think they're going to keep this news to themselves? What are my folks going to say?" I hadn't given much thought to that. "And after the F-bomb I dropped at church the other night, I have a higher profile! My father is going to disown me." He sounded scared.

"I'm sorry, Angel," I apologized, using the nickname, I'd given him at seven years of age. "I just wasn't thinking when I opened my mouth and outed us. I was just so fucking pissed off at Ross and his shitty attitude."

“I get it, but now what am I gonna do? Should I just ignore it and hope no one gossips? You know my father’s never going to understand the idea of you defending me because I’m your boyfriend.” He let out a slight chuckle at the mere idea, indicating he wasn’t totally pissed at me.

“I’ve fucked this up for us.”

We sat there in silence for several minutes. Perhaps both of us were strategizing about what to do next. It was an impossible situation.

“What do you think your parents would do if they found out?”

He turned to face me. “Best case scenario, and it’s not good, they’d ban me from seeing you. Worst case, kick me out of the house.”

“Fuck!” I slammed my fists on my thighs in anger. “I have really fucked this up and I don’t know how to fix it.”

“Honestly, Joey, my folks have never spoken about this type of thing with me. I assume they’re not going to think it’s acceptable based on their Christian teachings. But then again, they’ve never outright told me that boys with boys isn’t acceptable, but don’t you suppose they’ll be against us?”

I hadn’t thought about how my loose tongue would affect him. “I didn’t even stop to think about your folks. I’ve screwed this up big time!”

I reached my hand across the console and grabbed his hand. “I love you, Angel. We’re in this together. I’m all-in regarding us being our true selves, but if you need to hide our relationship, that’s fine too. My grands are cool with us, plus they already know what you mean to me, so we could ask them for advice if you’re willing.”

He gave it a moment and then responded. “Let’s give it a few days and make a decision once we’ve had time to think on it, ok?”

“Can I still come over tonight?’ I asked sheepishly, staring at the floorboard. “I want to be with you.”

“Yeah. I’d like that.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: Caleb

Six Years Ago

"Do you have any other friends at school besides Joey, son?" Father set his paper down and reached for his coffee mug.

"Sure, Dad, but Joey's my best friend."

"What is it about Joey that makes him your best friend?" he asked. "You two are together every day, don't you ever get tired of seeing him that much?" He took a sip of his coffee and sat his cup back down.

I wasn't sure what he was getting at. It was true that in the past five years since he'd moved in with his grands, we were always together. We'd made sure that any chance we had to spend time with each other, we did. We shared every secret and every dream we'd had and told each other how we would be best friends forever. I had started telling him I loved him, but he either ignored me or didn't quite know what to do with that information.

I tried my best to make Joey feel better about his mom and dad's mysterious disappearance. No one had seen them in five years. He figured they weren't coming home because it had been so long. I thought about that before answering my father's last question.

"Joey needs me. He doesn't have a mom and dad; I'm his family now. I want to make sure that he feels loved," I explained earnestly.

"Caleb, Joey has his grandparents, and they love him."

"I know, but they can't love him the way I love him," my twelve-year-old self innocently proclaimed, "and besides, it's my job to be there for Joey and take care of him. I promised I would."

My father let out a long breath. He was exasperated and upset

at the same time. He pushed his newspaper further out of his way and took his glasses off. I knew he was about to get serious about something.

"Son, it's not your job to love Joey or to take care of him. He has grandparents and that's their responsibility. I don't want you worrying about things like that at your age."

"But dad, I don't think you understand what Joey means to me. He told me I'm his angel and he figured this out when we were seven. We decided that we're going be together forever and love each other."

My father's eyes narrowed. "You're almost a teenager, son, and this kind of talk is not normal. You boys will grow up and then you'll understand that being friends is important, but you will have separate lives. Being together forever, as you say, is not going to happen. You'll understand when you're a man."

He sat across the table, waiting to see how I'd respond. He'd apparently not understood my point as far as I was concerned. I knew Joey and I would be together forever because that's what we both wanted, so it had to be true. There was no way I could be happy without him by my side. Besides, we kept our promises to each other, no matter what.

"I'm always going to love Joey. That's not ever going to change. Why would it?" I gave my father a quizzical look and calmly brought my hands together on the tabletop. He glared at me across the table, furrowing his brows like he had more to say.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: Joey

The two red taillights brightened ahead of me after Caleb tapped his brakes and slowed down to turn into his drive. I'd followed him home from school and my mind was on how we were going to keep his folks from hearing about my outburst. There was zero chance that no one would slip up and let the information out. Sure, I could talk to every one of our friends, but odds were still against us. Most of our friends and the bulk of the student body seemed totally cool with our relationship. However, even I had enemies—that had become apparent this past week. Overall, though, the news hadn't surprised anyone, especially because we'd been connected at the hip since second grade.

I honked and waved as I passed him. My own driveway was a quick left at the stop sign on Jones Road, and then a couple hundred yards further. I took the turn. Off to my right, near our farm, blue lights were flashing. I accelerated up the long drive. My heart was racing, worried that something had happened to my grands. I had an obsessive ability to worry about being left completely on my own. *I couldn't lose them too.*

Blue lights were illuminating the entire side yard, casting an odd reflection on the buildings. Killer, our cat and head mouser, was having nothing to do with the light show, and was scowling under the old propane tank that stood against the house. I turned off the ignition, not bothering to put the car in park because I was too shocked by the scene in front of me. Two other cars were parked right outside the house—the Sheriff's car as well as an unmarked government car. The latter had federal plates on the bumper and didn't look local. There was no ambulance, this wasn't a medical emergency. I got out, slamming the door and ran up to the front porch. My grandpa opened the door the moment he saw me through the kitchen window, and stepped out to stop me from rushing in.
"Gramps what's going on? Where's gram, is she ok? What's with the cop cars?" I was panicking and stumbled over my words.

"Gram's ok, son. We're both fine. No one's hurt," he reached out to grab my shoulder and reassure me. His eyes said otherwise, and I saw pain and dread.

"What is it?"

"Joey, the Sheriff's here; along with an FBI agent from Portland. It's about your Mom and Dad, son." I watched as tears built up in his eyes. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the Hollings yard light flash on. Caleb must have started his evening chores. I wished so badly that he was here, I had a sinking feeling I was going to need his love and support. I felt my knees buckle and my legs go weak, so I leaned into grandpa's arms.

"Did they find them?" I could barely croak the words out of my closed throat. "Are they alive, gramps? Are they coming home? Where were they?" Anxiety flooded my brain.

His hand came up behind my head, encircling it, and he pulled me tighter to his chest. The gesture alone confirmed the answer I couldn't bear to hear. The sob snuck up on me, loud and clear. *Please don't be them. Please... don't tell me anything.*

"They think your parents are dead, son. I'm so sorry."

I pulled away from him as tears streamed down my face. "Are they sure?" I asked, hoping he could change the outcome. I stared across the fields at Caleb's porch light again. I wondered what he was doing. He'd been with me throughout, and now I needed him again for what stood on the other side of the door.

Gram was sitting at the kitchen table with a handkerchief in her hand. Her eyes were swollen from crying, so I knew it was true. The two officers were in the kitchen as well. One was sitting next to gram, and the other was standing against the counter. Both had cups of coffee. *Of course gram would be the perfect hostess.* I recognized the female officer as part of our local Sheriff's department. The man standing had a raincoat on, FBI emblazoned on his chest. He was unfamiliar to me. He had a grizzled, worn look about him. His stern eyes viewed my pain with disinterested boredom. I thought about how many times they'd delivered this sort of news. Mr. FBI looked like the type that had grown a few extra layers of skin around his heart. He had that '*fuck this! I didn't sign up for this shit,'* look going on.

“Agent Kennedy and Officer Jenks have a couple of questions, Joey.” Grandpa had his hand on the back of my neck.

“This must be about my parents?” I looked from face to face as I scanned the room for information. “Where’d you find them? How do you know it’s them? Are you sure it’s even them?” I rattled off, as if I were law enforcement myself.

Grandpa guided me to a chair at the kitchen table, and gently positioned me into it. The kitchen was normally the center of love and laughter in my grands’ home. The great smells that emanated from it, and my gram moving around humming a soft melody as she flitted here and there. Not tonight. Tonight, it was dim and cold, and she had withered into an old woman I didn’t recognize. Years of living in a bubble of hope of seeing her son again had just popped, and she was deflating fast.

“Joseph, or do you prefer I call you Joey?” the female officer began.

“Call me Joey. Joseph is my dad’s name.” I suddenly felt very protective of my dad.

“We’ve already spoken with your grandparents. We have news that you will probably find distressing. I want you to know that I am sorry to have to bring this information to you.”

“Just spit it out.” I felt my grandpa’s grip tighten on my shoulder.

“Show some respect, son.”

I glanced across the table at gram and saw the blank stare on her face. I could tell that in the past thirty minutes or so all the years of waiting and wondering had finally made their way to her face. Her eternal optimism had finally been beaten by the news. Her eyes had emptied what water they had, and now she just stared ahead, at nothing. I knew what was coming next.

“Joey, we believe that we have found the remains of your parents. We informed your grandparents before you arrived. However, it’s you we need to speak to about this,” she said gently.

“Why me?” I mumbled.

“You’re eighteen, is that correct?”

“Yeah, barely.”

“As an adult and the closest living relative, we are required to inform you of the discovery of their remains and discuss what comes next for you.” The female officer had kind eyes. *I knew she hated this shit. She said remains right? Did I hear her correctly?* I was in an internal battle, trying to win a war I’d been fighting for eleven years.

“We are confident it’s your parents. Their bodies were discovered three days ago in a valley on the outskirts of Bend during an excavation project by the city. I’m sorry to have to tell you this part, Joey, but they were found together… in a shallow grave.

Together, huh? The whole time… Well, that’s something, ain’t it? I was losing the battle.

“What took so fucking long?” I muttered, sounding as nasty as I could. I had tears streaming down my face and snot sliding out of my nose. “What took you people so goddamned long?” My heart exploded. I moved my sweat-shirt clad arm across my face in a slow, agonizing show of disgust and smeared all my pain onto it.

Grandpa didn’t bother to clench down on my neck again. I guess the news was as hard to hear as my angry outburst.

“Joey, we are lucky that the discovery was made. I don’t mean lucky, like good…” the kind officer started to say. I raised a hand to her to indicate that I needed her to please just shut the fuck up. I sensed a massive sob building in my throat, the pain of the past eleven years trying to burst forth. Profound sadness at the discovery of their bodies and the newfound reality that my folks hadn’t abandoned me. I gazed miserably over at gram and then up to grandpa, my face jagged with despair. I had an incredulous look on my face.

“They didn’t leave me after all. All these years of wondering and *poof*, that’s it, no more blaming myself.” I looked at gram as fresh tears fell from her eyes. “It never was about me, was it? They couldn’t have come back for me, could they?”

My grandpa’s chest heaved in pain as he absorbed my silence. “No son, it never was, and I’m so sorry. Your mom and dad loved you

so much and now we know why they couldn't come home." His voice cracked, and it was painful to witness.

He turned away from me to face the counter and gripped its edge tightly. I realized that the finality of me losing my parents was also the finality of them losing their only son. I sat upright in the chair and turned to the graying, obviously bored, FBI agent. He looked like he was running lead on this crime.

"What do you need from me? You need me to identify them or what?" I asked. He turned to the other officer. Maybe I was wrong about who was running lead, something to do with local jurisdiction or whatever.

"I'm sorry, Joey, but the positive identification will take place forensically. Unfortunately, after eleven years in the outdoors, your parents' remains are limited to only bones." Her face revealed all I needed to know; I didn't want to see that. She continued, "However, we have found something around the larger, most likely male, skeleton's neck."

"You mean my dad's neck, right? Just say mom or dad, can you? My parents aren't a bunch of bones to me!" I burned with rage.

"I am sorry. Yes, your father's body had a necklace around it. It is in good condition and has weathered the years." I heard grandpa gasp at that. He turned back to the table and gave gram an ominous look. "There are a few bits of clothing, but using them as identifiers would be hard, considering you were only seven at the time of their disappearance." She faced grandpa, and sadness came over her at having to witness his pain too.

"Can you determine how they died, ma'am?" I asked, deciding to be more respectful. "I'd also like to know why they were in a grave out in the middle of nowhere. Who put them there?"

"That's what we are attempting to find out now. The disappearance of your parents was never labeled a crime, Joey. However, after the discovery of their bodies, it will be."

"What's the difference?"

"Your father and mother… they were… murdered. Both had gunshot wounds in their skulls. There's no doubt a crime was

committed, they were shot and placed there." She looked away for a moment to gather herself. I knew she was in distress at delivering this news so bluntly.

"How do you confirm it's them if there's only bones left?" I asked, grasping for hope.

"Your parents are the immediate guess due to the missing person's report that has been on file for a decade, but we will need to take a DNA sample from you for positive ID. There is also the matter of the necklace; that could give us another substantial clue. We need to show you and your grandparents. It was discovered on the male skel…. your dad's body," she corrected herself.

I watched anxiously as she turned to the FBI agent and motioned for him to hand her something. He reached into his jacket and pulled out a small beige envelope that had the word "EVIDENCE" typed on its face. I watched gram raise her head as grandpa slowly moved closer to the table. The officer removed a small piece of tape on the envelope's edge and put her palm out flat as she dropped the contents into her hand.

"Do you recognize this?

It landed backward in her hand. From my angle, all I could see was a blank disc. I heard gram catch her breath and grandpa quietly slide into the only available chair at the table. His eyes were saucers and I saw the pain of recognition ripple across his face like a wave. I opened my shaking hand and moved it toward the officer. My gesture was obvious to her, and she gently laid the necklace in my hand. My heart pounded as I touched the silver chain with the nickel-sized circular disk that hung from it. I hesitated but knew that I needed to turn the disk over. The side facing me was blank and it was clear that what I needed to see was on the other side. Gram reached her hand across the table to meet grandpa's hand and their eyes were locked on each other. They knew. I moved my other hand slowly from under the table to grab the edge of the disc in my fingers. *Turn it over Joey. All you have to do… is turn it over.* I suddenly knew as well. My mind flashed back to the five-year-old me, being held by my dad, a reflection of sunlight dancing from his neck.

Slowly, I twisted my fingers to reveal the other side. There it was. At that precise moment, all the dreams I had of my parents coming back to me, and all the pain I had carried of being abandoned

eleven years ago was in between my fingers. They wouldn't be coming back. I raised my head so the Sheriff could hear me clearly.

"It's them." The face of the medallion was staring back at me, and there was the proof. The Crow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: Joey

Four Years Ago

"Did you hear that?" Caleb whispered nervously, grabbing my arm tightly as we stared into complete darkness.

"It's the wind, Angel. You'll be alright," I assured.

His body shivered with fear as he remained glued to my side. "I'm glad you're here tonight, Joey. I'm not usually this freaked out by noises, but this storm is kind of scary, dontcha think?"

I could try to reassure him again or I could milk his fear a little longer. The payoff would be more snuggling, and that was totally worth it. *Decision made!* Caleb depended on me to protect him and looked to me for guidance on anything he was unsure of. I loved that he craved my touch whenever he felt nervous or frightened. Although lately, it wasn't restricted to fear. He wanted me when he was happy, excited, and whenever else the desire struck him.

"Maybe it's an animal," I whispered.

"Ya think?" he gripped my shoulder tighter.

We were only a hundred yards from his house, but the storm had him on edge. "Wanna go back to the house and sleep there?" he asked. I knew he was frightened by the thunder and lightning illuminating the sky across the plateau.

"Nah, it's more fun in the barn. I'll protect you." I scooted closer and put an arm under his head. The position would become the *go-to* arrangement for many years to come.

We'd piled bales of hay in an elaborate fort-like design and were having a sleepover in the loft of the Hollings barn. It was early spring, and I'd recently turned fourteen while he would remain thirteen until the coming summer. I dreaded the coming months

knowing Caleb had to work the farm with his father and had little time for these kinds of adventures. Once he had gotten big enough to drive the farm equipment, his father had him working full-time. The past few months saw him sprouting about four inches and putting muscle on his lean frame. Even with him being a big kid for his age, he still wanted me to be there to hold him. I'm not gonna lie, I liked how I felt when we were together, but lately, the way he made me feel was different. Whenever we hung out, my eyes were preoccupied with trying to check him out and I found myself embarrassed by the need to. I felt possessive and cared about him so much. The words to describe my feelings had been difficult to find that spring, and I often stumbled around trying to meet him halfway when he proclaimed his love for me. It was hard for me to say those three words to anyone because my heart always feared losing the ones I loved. Best to be safe and not jinx what we had.

Large hay-producing farms had massive barns. The storage lofts were cavernous, the main floor generally reserved for livestock. The Hollings' only had a couple horses. He turned his flashlight on, illuminating the inside of the barn. We were zipped separately in our own sleeping bags and had them pulled down below our arms so he could hold on to me.

A roosting bird on one of the exposed rafters rustled from its slumber, causing Caleb to jump. "That was scary," he whispered, his body shuddering. "I like it better when you're zipped in with me, can we do that?"

I tried to act casual about the request, but I'd been thinking the same thing and was more than willing to use the excuse. "I guess if it helps you feel safer."

We crawled out of our bags and stood in the flashlight-lit loft in nothing but our boxers. Seeing him undressed made my heart ache. The pain associated with want is a strong ache, and I swallowed hard at the sight of him; he took my breath away. I quickly averted my eyes as he innocently waited for me to free him of his fear.

We zipped our bags together and slid back in. His warm skin touched mine as he lie beside me. "If you're still scared, you can hold onto me."

"Thanks."

He scooted beside me and placed a hand across my chest. I felt weak lying there with my best friend. Both of our teenage gangly limbs connected under the warmth of the sleeping bags. Nerves I'd never felt were tingling throughout my young body. We couldn't get close enough as far as I was concerned.

"You ok now?"

"I'm always ok with you, Joey, always."

He lifted his head from my chest and lightly kissed my cheek. I knew I loved him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: Caleb

Rebecca's footsteps echoed loudly as she clomped up the stairs from the living room.

"Caleb, Caleb, it's snowing. Can we go out and build a snowman? Can we?" she begged, rushing into my bedroom. Sometimes I envied Joey having no siblings and then there were times like this, when having a younger sister was great.

I walked across my bedroom to the lone window and pulled the drapes to the side to verify her weather report, finding that heavy snow had indeed fallen. The small room looked exactly like it had since I was a boy. A simple bed, one high boy dresser with a couple of tractor scale models on top, and an old chair in the corner where an older fan sat. The cross above my headboard had been there for as long as I could remember. "God sees all Caleb," my father had said. *Kind of made the discovery of my penis a problem.*

My younger sister was a sweet eleven-year-old, and this was the first serious snow of this fall, so I figured it wouldn't hurt to have some fun with her. I'd only been home for two hours but had managed to complete my chores and homework. Last I saw of Joey was when he'd honked and waved as he went home earlier, and I was excited thinking about him coming over later.

"Ok, Squirt. Put some warm clothes on and don't forget your gloves." Rebecca squealed and ran down the hall to her bedroom to get changed. "Did you do your homework?" I yelled after her.

"Yes," she hollered back.

All my snow gear was in the mudroom, so I made my way down only to see Becky had beaten me and was excitedly waiting downstairs. Our mother had made each of us a hot cocoa. With those cups of yummy firmly in our hands, we headed for the front yard. There was plenty of grass under the snow, so it'd be smooth for us to

roll perfect snowman body parts. Becky rolled the snowballs until they got too big for her, and I took over to make sure we had the right sized snowman. She liked her snowmen to be as big as her brother but ended up complaining about the size.

"Not too big Caleb. Last year Frosty was too big for me to put clothes on him," she reminded me.

"So, this year you want smaller? Make up your mind princess." I tossed a snowball at her cute pigtail sporting head.

I laughed, remembering how my mother discovered a few of her clothing items on the snowman last year. Her favorite housecoat had been the finishing touch.

"Did you remember a carrot, Beck? You can't forget his nose."

"Ooopsie, I forgot." As quick as a flash, she headed to the kitchen to secure her nose.

I lifted my face to the falling snowflakes. I loved the certain quiet that happened when it snowed, a blanket of insulation dampening the sound of life around us. The farm was beautiful in the snow, and one year after a big snowstorm, my mother had the idea to take a picture of the house and farm from the road. She liked the result so much that she'd made Christmas cards out of the picture and mailed them to all our family and friends.

As I returned my eyes to the horizon, my gaze drifted across the closest field and to Jones Road, which separated our farm from the Crow farm. Joey's driveway was easily visible from this side of our yard. My heart warmed at the memory of seeing him there for the first time when we were seven. He'd been so skinny and frail; I'll never forget the sadness that was on his face. Eleven years later and I know the reason.

Through the heavy snowflakes slowly descending to the ground, I could make out the outline of a car that was sitting along the road. It appeared the car was idling since I noticed exhaust billowing from it in the chilly air. *Who is that? Probably stuck.*

Becky returned with an orange veggie in tow. "Mom gave me the best carrot ever," she declared, as she marched over to our snowman. "Here, put that on him, Caleb," she said, handing me the

carrot and stepping back. I turned back again, toward the idling car across the snowy field, a strange and sinking feeling passed through me.

"Hey Beck, do your big brother a favor, will ya? Go ask father if we can use his binoculars, they're in the kitchen drawer. Make sure you get permission, ok?"

"What we gonna look at?"

"Hush, hurry up. I need to check on something."

Becky came rushing back with the binoculars in her hand and gave them to me. "What is it, Caleb? What are you looking at? Lemme see," she said like a typically impatient eleven-year-old.

"Come with me, we're going back in the house," I said, getting concerned about the car, knowing I'd soon have a terribly upset little sister.

"I wanna play more, you promised me a snowball fight too. You know you're *sposed* to keep your promises," she whined, swatting away my outstretched hand.

"It's pronounced, *supposed,* Becky, and please listen to me right now. I'll make it up to you tomorrow."

"You always say that!" she cried, stomping away, ignoring my hand.

I forcibly grabbed her hand and escorted her back into the house. Her enthusiasm for big brother had waned. My father was in his favorite old leather chair by the fire and had the local evening news on.

He raised an eye at me with a questioning look. "You need something son? What were the binoculars for?"

"I think Joey's car is broken down along the road, sir. Can I walk across the field and see if he's ok?"

"Of course, come back if he needs a tow and I'll fire up a tractor to help you boys."

“Yes, sir, I will if we need extra help. His car is idling so I think he’s just stuck in the snow, like you said. You know how low his car sits to the ground.”

“Sure do, and it absolutely makes no sense to me why a young man that lives on a farm needs a car like that.”

“Back soon, and please tell mother I’ll get the food scraps out to the compost pile when I get back.” I was yet to finish my last chore and the final thing I needed was my mom ratting me out to him.

I grabbed the flashlight by the back door and headed out to the field. The door slammed shut from the wind coming across the yard, so I knew my father grimaced. The snow was about four inches deep by then and was really sticking to the ground. The field had been turned over in October, and with the recent freeze, it was easy to jog across its hard surface as I headed to the car.

I got closer and saw that the car wasn’t stuck. He had his favorite eighties and nineties music on, having grown up listening to it with his dad and grandpa, and was reclined in the driver’s seat. They were both music lovers, especially the seventies soft rock stuff. Joey’s grandpa had once told me that the seventies were the last great musical decade. *Whatever that meant.* My conservative household didn’t allow modern music, especially rock music.

I dragged a glove encased finger across the trunk of the car as I came around, a few inches of snow had accumulated, meaning he’d been sitting here for a while. The interior lights were off, and he appeared to be asleep. I tapped on his window, startling him awake. He stared at me, unable to see me clearly through the dusting of snow, so I brushed the window and peered through the glass and into his eyes. His damp face exposed the previous tear tracks that had left trails down his cheek bones. He sat there sadly staring into my eyes, not even acknowledging my presence, so I opened the door and bent down to my knees. A huge sob escaped him, catching me off guard, so I reached into the car and held him close.

“Joey, what is it?” His body wracked with sobs and breaths he tried to catch as he failed to get a word out. He clung to me; his clamped throat prevented him from telling me.

“It’s ok. I’m here now. It’s all going to be fine. Just let it out, I’ve got you.” My heart broke as he buckled and allowed himself to be

held. He was completely limp against my chest, hanging halfway out of the door. I began to get numb from kneeling and getting covered in snow, so I gently removed him from my grip and repositioned him into his seat, making sure to push the unlock button for the other side of the car. “I’m coming around.”

‘Love will keep us alive’ continued playing on the car stereo. He’d played the Eagles hit for me before while sharing a memory he’d had of his mom vacuuming and swooning over her favorite band.

“I’m going to take you to see them in concert, baby boy. You’ll understand why your mom loves her some Eagles when you see them live.” He’d told me how she liked to hold the feather duster as her mic and mimic the lead singer.

His mom swept him into her arms, and they’d slow danced around the room, his feet dangling in the air, giggling and being silly. He’d loved a particular scent of lotion on her skin, loving how wonderful she’d smelled, and pretty she’d been.

As if he’d read my mind, he said, “I wish I knew the name of that lotion she had on Caleb.”

“I know you do.”

I heard him whisper something again, but couldn’t make out what he was saying, so I adjusted the volume of his stereo. “What did you say?” I asked gently.

He struggled to speak. “That’s mom’s favorite song. She played that a lot when I was little, we’d sing along to it. She… loved it so much.” A fresh stream of tears sprang from his eyes, and he tried to suppress another deep sob.

“I remember you sharing that with me. You told me she smelled so sweet, and she was so beautiful. I remember, Joey.”

Through his sobbing, I couldn’t be sure, but it sounded like he said. “My mom and dad are together.”

“What?” *He must be confused about something.*

“They found them together at least. I’m happy about that part. Together… yeah, they’re together,” he murmured dreamily,

melancholy in his voice.

I began to understand what might have happened. “Joey, what are you saying? Your mom and dad are together? You know where they are?” I asked.

“Yeah, but they’re not coming back though. Not now, not tomorrow, not ever.”

I reached across the center console and grabbed his right hand. I held it tight and watched as his head fell forward, his long hair cascading forward, faintly obscuring his face from my view.

I stared in silence as more tears fell, wetting his jeans. “I love you, Angel,” he whispered. “Please don’t leave me, I can’t be without you in my life.” He turned his head to me, whispering again, “Mom was right about angels, you know.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Joey. I’m here, and I’m going to stay right here for as long as you need. Yes, your mom knew you’d meet an angel, you told me that story, and I believe you.”

“I mean, ever. Please don’t leave me alone, ever. I can’t live without you; you’re the angel.”

My heart broke at that last sentence. I’d been his angel since we were seven years old. He always forgot that it’s him that protected me and that he was my angel too.

I moved a hand to the side of his head and lifted his hair back so he could see me. “First off, I’ll never leave you alone or leave you… period. Second, what’s this about? How bad is it? You’re really scaring me.”

Even though I’d had eleven years to prepare for the eventuality, I wasn’t prepared for what he said next. “My mom and dad are dead. That’s why they never came back for me. They are both… dead!” His voice was childlike and soft. I sat motionless, staring at the side of his head. I gathered all the information and filed it in my stunned mind. I needed to proceed, carefully and thoughtfully.

My right hand absentmindedly wiped some dust off the dashboard of the Honda, providing me time to confirm an awful truth. “Your mom and dad… are dead? You’re sure?” I asked, stunned by the

news. “When did you find out?” I couldn’t grasp that in the past three hours he’d discovered that his parents were dead.

“I’m sure. I left the house after talking with both the Sheriff and the FBI. I wasn’t sure where to go, what to do… my parents were murdered.” He raised his head and turned toward me, his face wet from tears, his stare cold and vacant. “They were murdered. Both shot in the head. Who does something like that? How can something like that happen?” He begged for an answer to an unanswerable question.

I listened in stunned silence, staring at my free hand as it nervously tapped on my knee. What do you say to the person you love more than anything in the world after they tell you their parents were murdered? I’d never experienced the death of someone so close to me. *Heck,* I still had both pairs of grandparents in my life. My brain had no answers and my heart simply ached too much to know what do to do with this revelation.

“I don’t know the answer to that. I’m deeply sorry though. I knew your folks would never have abandoned you. At least you now know for sure, right? They didn’t leave you, Joey.”

At least? Did I actually say that? I made it out to be some sort of a door prize. I needed to try harder. “One thing is certain though; I will never leave you and I promise I’ll be here to help you through this in any way that I can,” I said, hoping he hadn’t thought me insensitive.

“Thank you, Angel.” He let out a tired sigh and smiled weakly through his tears. “I don’t know what I’m gonna do now. Where do I go? What do I do with my life now?”

He needed guidance and it would be up to me to make the short-term decisions. “First thing we’re going to do is let your grands know you’re alright. We’re going back to your house to check in with them and I’m coming with you. Can you drive?” I asked. He got out, and I took that as a *no*.

“I love you,” he whispered.

“I know.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: Landon

My phone had been blowing up all morning with texts from Veronica. We'd been out the night before at a new wine bar named *Cork*, and she'd met some banker that had caught her eye. She probably wanted to fill me in on the sexcapades of her evening after I'd left her there. I lay in my bed for a few extra minutes, stretching my legs and relieving some aches I'd had in my arms from working out. My workouts had intensified since I'd plowed Frank. He was in such amazing shape that I'd decided to add some more muscle to my frame. Plus, you never knew when I might be wrestling that big ol queen again.

I grabbed my phone from the nightstand and tapped her name. "What's up bitch? You sure picked up quick. How was your evening?" I asked.

"Hush up for a sec, Lannie. Where's your Dad?" She sounded worried, even frightened.

"Why, what the fucks going on?" I wanted a dose of smut, but she wasn't biting. Maybe the banker stud had a one incher.

"Are you home?" she asked barely above a whisper.

"Yeah…"

"Is your Dad there?"

This wasn't about banker dude at all, "Yes, I'm home. I didn't get lucky like you did last night."

"Shut the fuck up and listen to me. Have you seen a paper today or watched the news this morning?"

"Uh, no… I just woke up girl, why? What's going on, Ronnie? You're kinda freaking me out."

“Good! You should be! Listen up, the police found two dead bodies at the new transfer station the county is building outside of town. They’ve been identified as the married couple that disappeared from the Warm Springs Reservation ten or so years ago.” I could visualize Ronnie turning her head side to side, on the lookout for listeners, like the mafia was nearby.

“First off, why are we whispering?”

“Listen, maybe I’m wrong here, but the news says that those people had fought against your dad’s company to prevent him from building The Warm Springs Resort. They are making a whole deal of the coincidence that they magically went missing shortly after, and some high-profile news reporter has launched a big investigation and subpoenaed the police to get old records about the investigation.” *She had my fucking attention now*. “This is the same reporter that broke that huge story about the mayor and his wife taking kickbacks from developers. Shit, Landon, she might have a twofer here considering what I know about your father.” Veronica paused to sip her coffee, the slurp unmistakable. “One of the remains discovered was of a man—the son of a big chief type or maybe he was the chief, fuck! I don’t know, maybe an Elder, or something like that.” She needed to take a breath. “Don’t you think it’s a bit too fucking coincidental that the news is bringing up your dad’s name and his company, associating him with their disappearance?” She sounded more than a little alarmed.

I gritted my teeth and whispered a shocked hiss. “Are you fucking serious? What channel was this on?”

“Just google the Bend Bulletin newspaper—it’s all over the goddamned front page. Fuck, Landon! This is some serious shit. You think your dad’s capable of something like this? I mean, fuck! He’s been pestering us at county to push through some bogus permits because he wants more land over at the Cove Palisades.” Veronica lowered her voice even more. “And get this, I looked through the land plots your dad’s trying to buy, and one of the biggest plots of land he wants, get ready for this… is owned by… Joseph Crow Senior, the dead guy’s father.

I swear I could hear the speed dial from my dad’s phone downstairs, dialing his attorneys.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: Caleb

Joey hadn't been to school for a few days since the news of his parents' death. I went over to his place after school every day to check in on him and drop off homework. The entire school was in an uproar over two issues concerning him. What happened to his parents', and would he be back to play quarterback for the big Homecoming game? His grandparents had been very welcoming. They'd been worried sick after he drove off in the snow, stunned by the news the Sheriff had delivered. The past couple of nights had been better for Joey, and I hoped I could make him more like himself again.

I stayed with Joey after I'd safely returned him to his house. We passed his grandparents who were stone silent in the quiet kitchen. I gave them an understanding half smile as we passed through, letting them know I'd found him near the end of their driveway.

Joey sat down on the edge of his bed in a daze, and I gently helped him out of his coat and boots and had him lie back. I walked over to the light switch and flicked it off, kicking my own boots off, and then climbed into his bed, wrapping my arms around him, holding him quietly until I heard his breathing slow, accompanied by an occasional crying hiccup.

I quietly slid out of bed, picked up my boots, and tip-toed across the dark bedroom; the only light was the reflection from the moon, casting its bright reflection off the new snow. I carried my boots with me down the stairs that descended into the kitchen. Joey's grandparents were sitting at the dining table in silence. Mr. Crow looked up when I had cleared the final step. I stood silently at the bottom, unsure of what to do or say. Things were very still as they both stared at glasses of water, obviously not touched. The ticking of the wall clock was the only sound in the tidy kitchen. It was an uncomfortable sound in a quiet space, as the clock imitated a countdown, forcing me to break the silence.

"He's asleep."

Joey's grandmother offered her hand to me. I took it, noticing how

cold and frail it felt. She pulled me to the chair beside her, motioning me to sit, and smiled a 'barely there' smile, letting out a slow, sad breath. She'd never appeared defeated to me. Usually, she was full of spunk, always bright and welcoming. The woman sitting beside me was none of those things.

"Thank you, son, for being here for Joey tonight," she spoke in a whisper. "He must have driven to the end of the driveway, knowing you'd spot him and come to his rescue. He knows he can count on you, Caleb. The boy loves you, no doubt."

She squeezed my hand a bit tighter. "Well, honestly, ma'am, it really was just luck that I was outside with Becky when I noticed his car."

I'd barely finished my sentence when Mr. Crow raised his head. "We don't believe in luck."

"Oh? I'm sorry, sir, I didn't mean anything negative by it."

"I know, son, and that's not what I meant to imply by my comment. I'm sure you already know this, but our heritage is important to us. We believe that luck is evil and happens by chance. Our people believe in purpose and guidance." I listened to Joey's grandfather's wise counsel and found myself nodding my head in agreement. "It was not chance that you were there for our Joey. You've been there for him from the day you stood across that road, the day you saw each other for the first time. His gram and I've witnessed the journey you two share. We consider you to be a part of our grandson, Caleb. Your spirit runs beside his, we can see that clearly."

I felt overwhelmed by what he'd said and even more saddened to remember that they'd lost a son. "Thank you, sir. I've wanted to share with both of you how I feel about Joey, but I've been too afraid to admit the truth… out loud." I stared at the hand that Joey's grandmother still held tightly in her lap and then tilted my face toward her.

"Oh, dear child, you don't have to say that. It's your actions that show us who you are," she began, "we've raised our grandson the best we could, and we've witnessed the care and love with which Joey holds you to himself. All we as his guardians have done was be open to where his path for love takes him." Her smile warmed.

"We've witnessed for years how he's followed his path, holding you in his heart," Mr. Crow added. "Your paths are joined, it would appear."

He glanced over at his wife and gave her a knowing smile. "What you both decide to make of your journey as adults will test the love that binds you to each other."

I looked quizzically from one to the other, almost in disbelief. "You know the kind of love I have for him? I have to be straightforward with you, I don't think we are just best friends anymore."

Mr. Crow chuckled, lifting his hand to Joey's grandmother, inviting her to continue. "Was it ever just that, Caleb? We don't doubt you, and we sure don't question the strength of your conviction to love Joey. You've been building the foundation of love with him for years."

"What are you afraid of, son?" Mr. Crow interjected.

"Honestly… a lot of things. I've been afraid to admit that I want to be with Joey as… like… his mate?" I struggled with a label I could share with them. "Is that ok to say? Gosh, I don't even know how to describe it to you." I felt heat on my face and knew I was blushing. I reached for one of the full glasses of water and drew a long sip of it. I wiped my mouth with my sleeve and found the elder Crows looking at me with rapt attention, so I continued. "I also worry about my family's faith and teachings about living that lifestyle. Most of my experience has been with folks that say what Joey and I share is wrong in God's eyes. I feel unsure of myself trying to explain my feelings to you both, and I really worry what my folks would say… or do." I paused at the thought of my folks finding out. "If I can't find the right description to explain my feelings for him to you two, how will I ever explain it to them?" I felt panicked at the thought of revealing this to my ultra-conservative parents.

Mr. Crow pushed his chair back and scootched it closer to me. I felt their loving support on either side of me. "Caleb, your generation has a name for what you feel for our grandson, we know that. However, our people aren't hung up on labels, but suffice it to say, you love him like a mate. We accept that and support your love." He appeared to be cautiously choosing his next words. "However, your faith will be harder for you to grapple with when it comes to the love you speak of. Joey's gramma and I have concerns." I gazed at him, holding my breath, anticipating his wisdom. "Can you live an authentic life with Joey as your partner? How will you explain your feelings to your parents? It won't be an easy task for you, son." He glanced at his wife with a questioning eye, looking for help or suggestions.

Joey's gramma jumped in. "Maybe it would be wise for you to wait

until you're independent and on your own, so as not to risk your stability." She turned back to Mr. Crow, smiling through swollen eyes. "As Joseph said, we love our grandson unquestionably, and that means we love you because he loves you. He has chosen you, and we accept his choice. In fact, we don't just accept it; that would be a wrong description. We celebrate our grandson's choice." She had a big loving smile on her face as she squeezed my hand.

Hearing Joey's grandparents express their concerns for my stability had me thinking about what I'd do if my folks found out. Where would I go if they made me leave their home after discovering I was sinning in God's eyes? I didn't have any significant savings or a job. Farming had been my life and I still depended on my folks, even though I was eighteen.

"Joey's going to need you, Caleb. Even more so with the news he's received. I know my grandson, and he'll be worrying about loss, abandonment, and who he can trust. I need you to just be you, son. With our love and support, and yours, we can get him through this. He believes in you, Caleb, and we need you to be his support system right now. Can you do that for us?" she asked, genuine concern written on her face.

"Of course, ma'am. I promise I'll do my best." She patted my hand affectionately.

I checked back in with Joey and found him fast asleep in his bedroom, so I decided to head home. His grands gave me a big hug and walked me to the front porch to see me off.

"He will be at school tomorrow, son," Mrs. Crow said.

"I am on it, ma'am. I got him. Please don't worry."

I'd been right and my optimism was paying off, Joey was in good spirits. I'd caught him up on a difficult calculus assignment and we cuddled a bit. Nothing too excessive because I knew that that kind of action was a bit premature. He was more like the positive person I adored, and it made me feel better too. I could tell he was moving forward from his loss. He was joking more and teasing me as he'd always enjoyed doing.

We'd gathered at the kitchen table and banter occupied most of the evening. Mrs. Crow had baked an out-of-this-world lasagna and I was served half of it.

“You eat like this every night, and you never told me?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at Joey.

“After watching that pig-out session you wonder why, seriously?” Joey said, buttering his fourth piece of garlic bread.

“Well, it’s so darn good, thank you, ma’am,” I managed to squeeze out, still chewing the last bite. “I best be getting home. I’ve still got chores.”

“I’ll grab the forklift and help you to your Jeep,” Joey’s grandpa teased.

It was a short drive home from the Crow farm, but I still had time to revisit the discussion I’d had earlier in the week with Joey’s grands regarding stability and being authentic. The more I tossed it over in my mind, the more hopeless I felt about my future if my parents discovered my secret and continued to wrestle with the anxiety and fear.

My parents were sitting in the living room when I got home. Father put his bible down and cleared his throat, so I assumed he wanted to speak with me. They knew about Joey’s loss and had been understanding about my afterschool visits that entire week.

“How is Joey, son? Did you get a chance to speak with his grandparents?”

“Yes, sir. They’re doing as well as expected. They’re worried about Joey and how he’s managing the bad news.”

“Your mother and I have been watching the news tonight and there appeared to be an initial investigation concerning the Alexanders. I’m not sure what kind of relationship you maintain with Mr. Alexander Sr.’s son, but I forbid you from speaking to that man again. You understand? Under no circumstances.” He gave me one of his patented, *do not disobey me,* looks.

“Yes, sir, I understand.”

“Such a tragedy,” my mother tsked, shaking her head side to side. “We should send over some food or offer help in some way.”

“Thanks, mother, I’m sure Mrs. Crow would appreciate it.”

She turned to my father and added, “All these years our boys have been such dear friends and yet, we barely know the Crows. Why haven’t we had them over for dinner dear?”

“Most likely because they’re not churchgoing people, Ma.” He opened his bible again as if to punctuate the fact.

“They are our neighbors, and the Christian thing to do is offer our friendship in times like this.” She was standing her ground. “It’s not right for us to not offer our sincere condolences. They lost their son and Joey has lost both his parents. How horribly tragic is that?” She adjusted the hem of her dress, dusting an unseen something off her lap. “I’m marching over there tomorrow with a pound cake and having coffee with Mrs. Crow. It’s long overdue!” With that, my mother put her cross-stitch down and headed straight to the kitchen for what I assumed would be a baking session. She had a pound cake to bake and a point to prove.

“Anything else, sir? May I be excused?” I waited for my father to respond.

“Yes, of course, son. That’s all… it seems I’ve upset your mother. Tell Joey we are both deeply sorry, will you please?”

I wandered up to my room trying to imagine my mother sitting at the table in Joey’s kitchen, several dream catchers spinning.

CHAPTER THIRTY: Joey

Jesus! Even Jaylen sent me a text? It'd been overwhelming to receive the huge amount of love from my schoolmates. They did their best to express their condolences via text and email, while others sent cards to the house. Caleb mentioned that a few weren't sure what the right thing to say was. He'd dropped by every night to hang out with me, and while it had been comforting, we were both feeling weird about being affectionate and handsy. It was him being nice and giving me space, but I knew he was sensitive, so I'd better jump his bones today and let him know I'd missed him.

Even though I'd begun to accept it, I felt strange, almost numb about my parents' bodies being found, and I wasn't sure why. Knowing they were dead seemed almost anticlimactic after waiting nearly eleven years for their return. Maybe discovering why they'd never returned had relieved me? It was certainly a shock to find out they were murdered, but I had the answer that had haunted me for so long.

The fact that their bodies were just a few miles away the entire time left me with a strangely comforting feeling. *Should I find comfort in that? Really?* Most people would find it odd, but Native folk—we think differently about death and remains. I looked back on their absence differently too. Knowing they'd been here spiritually made me feel better. *Were these wrong feelings to have?* I figured returning to school should help me figure more of these things out. I just needed time, that was all.

Grandpa had been speaking to me the past few days about spirits and paths. He'd made it clear that he'd always believed that my dad would never in a million years voluntarily walk away from his son. "He was so proud of you, Joey. You're the spitting image of him, even today," he said, pride oozing from his pores.

"Thanks gramps. I believe you."

"The important thing is that we honor your parents. Their lives were shortened by evil, and that cannot go unpunished. Besides assisting law enforcement with all the legalese, we also need to find the people who did this. We must release your parents' spirit from this world." He crossed his arms, a vacant expression on his face, a clue he'd been vision questing.

"Sorry, gramps, but what does all that mean exactly?"

"We will not receive the remains of your parents until their identification is certified and the coroner has all the data they need to prove the cause of death. Once we have that, we'll hold their feet to the fire. We must find the people who did this horrible deed."

"What about dad's necklace? Will we get it back? I want to wear it myself… if you'll let me." I knew it must've seemed like an odd request to voice at that particular time, but I'd been obsessing over it ever since I'd held it in my hands.

"I gave that necklace to your father when he was eighteen and he intended for you to have it when you became a man. He would've given it to you at eighteen and explained the importance of the necklace."

"What do you mean?" I asked, feeling a strange vibe creeping up on me. "Isn't that an odd coincidence that I just turned eighteen, gramps, and we found mom and dad, all within months?" I stared at him in disbelief. As soon as the words left my mouth, I knew he'd be all over it.

"That is not a coincidence," he said, his voice booming. "The only proof I'll ever need about the potency of that necklace has been given to me. Your parents' path has ended in this realm, son, but their spirits are strong. Even stronger, with you possessing the necklace soon. You can rest assured their journey with you has just begun, you'll see." His eyes glazed over as he saw my future and the journey.

There was a crowd around Caleb's jeep when I pulled into the school lot. It appeared he'd told our friends that I'd be back. Twenty or so students stood protecting my parking spot like guards at a great museum, protecting priceless paintings. Everyone moved out of the vacant spot next to the Jeep so I could park. I took a deep breath and stepped out of the Honda.

"Oh, Joey, sweety, I am so sorry." Charity was first in line and gave me a huge hug. She smelled of her usual sweet perfume. *Seriously? Shouldn't an eighteen-year-old, testosterone-driven male, be*

impacted by a super-hot, busty blonde, wrapping her arms around him? I got nothing here.

Her boyfriend Pete raised a hand for a usual high five before realizing we probably shouldn't be high fiving my parents being murdered. *Dumb shit.* "I'm sorry, Crow." He came in for a hug and a manly back slap, lingering a second too long, but I felt the love.

"It's all cool, Hastings. I'm gonna be fine, thanks, bro." I caught a whiff of Charity on him, proving my point that some of us are wired differently.

"We need you back, bro, so… bad. Last week's game blew donkey dong! We suck without you."

I'd read in the paper that Ross had stunk it up. I tried hard not to be happy about the news. *Not really, fuck him. I was happy as shit.*

"I'm back to practice on Monday. Coach has me out for tonight's game, but I'm back for reals come Homecoming," I said, slightly sad that I'd felt good about the prospect of returning to normalcy. *Shouldn't I be grieving more?* I felt like a bad son.

"Fuck, dude! That means another loss with Ross starting. Can't you talk with Coach, dude?" Pete wouldn't let it go.

I saw Caleb out of the corner of my eye, standing by patiently as my football buddies unloaded their shit on me. *Welcome back Crow, murdered parents and all.*

"I did the crime, Pete, so I'll serve the time. It's all good, I got us. We'll be back to winning next week," I promised, sounding like the confident quarterback my team needed me to be. I shot another embarrassed glance at my boyfriend. He just smiled and raised his eyebrows—'*go ahead, get to 'em all.'*

Pete was somewhat soothed by my statement about winning. "K, man, but I don't wanna lose my fucking Homecoming game my senior season." We banged our knuckles, and all was good in his world.

'Hey, stud." I slid to Caleb's side. "I've missed my boyfriend. How are you?" I threw an arm around his neck. A couple of my teammates shuffled their feet, quickly turning away, looking

uncomfortable, but *fuck that*! I loved him.

"Better, now that you're back. I'll give you some space today, looks like you'll need it." He moved his head in a circle, motioning to the good-sized crowd forming nearby. "There are a ton of people who are glad you're back. You're going to need a break from me till you settle in; we'll catch up at lunch."

He turned away, heading to first period. "Whoa! Not so fast, mister." I grabbed his arm and yanked him back. "Not without this." I planted my lips right on his while at least fifteen other students watched.

"Holy fuck!" Pete yelled. "How come I didn't get one of those?" Everyone laughed at his comment. It was great to be back.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: Caleb

"I am going to feel weird, Angel. I've never sat in the stands before."

He was right. I've never seen him anywhere near the bleachers. He'd been on a football field for as long as I could remember. He even started the JV team as a seventh grader. He's always been that good of an athlete.

"It was a pretty cool day though, all in all. Who the fuck woulda thought going back to school would be fun, huh? Heck, I even put up with listening to Hastings going off nonstop all day about the team."

Joey rattled on about his day while I stared out the window of his car. I knew I was supposed to be looking forward to going to the game with him, but I'd had a ton on my mind.

"Did you see dipshit Ross giving me the nasty stink eye? Not my fault he sucked so bad."

I was still lost in thought, so he tapped the brakes, causing me to snap forward and waking me from my stupor. "You even listening to me?"

"I think I'm gay," I blurted out. "I want to be with you like that, and I don't care who knows… and I'm so happy with you." I took a deep breath. "And… I know I love you very much… like mates, real serious and stuff." I hesitated for a second before adding, "I even told your grands how I feel. I told them I loved you." I dropped the bomb, thinking he'd be angry with me for not telling him earlier.

He pulled onto the shoulder of the deserted country road and put the car in park. "So, this is all about that? I already knew; gram told me *all about* your visit with her and grandpa. You know how they are; they don't keep secrets at their house."

“You’re not mad?”

“Mad? At what? That you told them something they already knew? Why would I be mad? I told them the same thing a long time ago.”

“You did? They never said anything.”

“Well… duh, of course, I did. The grands know about us, Caleb. I thought they’d told you that the other night when you were fumbling trying to admit to something they already knew,” he snickered.

“Don’t tease, Joey. I’m serious about this.”

“I’m sorry, but this headline of yours, it ain’t news to them. Why do you think gram spoke to you about being careful with your folks? They know I’ve made my choice; I plan on spending my life with you.”

My eyes welled up, heavy with tears. “You plan... you do? You said all that stuff?”

“What is all this, Caleb?” He stared at me like I’d just arrived on the planet. “You seem upset. I’m sorta crazy about you, that ain’t news to ya, is it?” He reached into his console and handed me some old McDonalds napkins he had there. “Here, blow your nose.”

I wiped my eyes and attempted to compose myself. “I’ve made a huge decision, maybe that’s why I’m so emotional right now.” He looked at me expectantly. “I’m not going to lie to my parents anymore and I’m not going to be someone I can’t be for them.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa… hang on, you sayin’ what I think you’re sayin’?”

“I can’t keep lying. That’s not who I am as a person. I hate people that lie, you know that. Well… I don’t hate people, that’s not good either, but you know what I mean.”

“True, but remember what gram told you? I agree with her. You think your folks are just gonna be cool with this shit? I mean… for real? Trust me on this, they ain’t! I’ll tell you what they *will* do

though; they're gonna shit bales of hay if they get news like this!"

"I don't care!"

Probably not the answer he'd expected. His face got serious, his brow furrowing, and his lips tightened. He sat there staring ahead. I knew he was putting it all together in his mind, trying to catch up with my declaration. "Well then, we'll need to speak with the grands before you tell your folks, Angel. We need a plan if you're serious about this. We're both still in school, have you forgotten about that?"

"No. I haven't forgotten, but I want to be honest with them. I need to tell them, and I need you to stand by me if I do," I said. I didn't usually argue or stand up for myself so strongly.

Joey sat back in his seat, placing his outstretched hands on the steering wheel, and let out a long, slow breath. I turned, trying to measure his reaction. He put his hands on his head and reached back to tighten his ponytail, a sign he was nervous or had a big decision to make.

"Let go of the hair, Joey. Tell me what you're thinking?" I sat silently, staring at his profile. *God, he was so handsome it was heartbreaking.*

After what seemed like an hour, even though it was exactly one minute and seventeen seconds—I'd been counting time on the car's digital clock, he surprised me. "Ok, Angel. Let's tell 'em."

"Huh? What do you mean *let's* tell them? As in you and me tell them?" I inquired, slightly shocked at his pronouncement.

"That's right. *I'm* your reason for telling them, correct? And *I'm* the guy you want to be with, right?"

"Yeah…" I murmured.

"Well, the man *you* love should be with the man *he* loves to tell *our* parents that *we* are in love, how about that?" He gave my hand a tight squeeze and looked me in the eye. "I wish my mom and dad could see us. They'd be so happy for me, having you in my life."

"I think they know."

We agreed that we'd speak with his grands about it first. That way we had parental fallback in case my folks freaked out.

The team ended up losing another game and a worried buzz ran through the crowd. Spectators had noticed Joey in the stands that night and asked him whether he was injured and why he wasn't playing. He was straightforward with everyone and admitted he'd violated team rules and had been benched. He'd added that he'd be back for the big game next week. That eased their minds sufficiently.

Mr. Johansson from Metolius, a town smaller than our own, about five miles south of Madras, spotted Joey in the stands and approached him.

"So sorry about your daddy, son. He was one hell of a ballplayer."

Joey was respectful of his elders and Mr. Johansson was obviously a fan of his father. "Thank you, sir, he was certainly that." Joey smiled and shook his outstretched hand. Mr. Johansson didn't release Joey, instead, he pulled him closer.

"Make your daddy proud, son. Do what he did and take your team to State. You certainly have all your daddy's skills, and you look so damn much like him, it's a bit unnerving. I can't stand what happened to him and your momma but watching you out there this year makes me and the Missus so darn proud."

The older man had a tear in his eye as he released Joey's hand. Joey shyly looked down to his hands and then back up to the kind gentleman standing before him. "I will, sir. I promise you, I will." He pulled him into his arms for a hug.

After the game, we waited with Charity in the parking lot near the locker room. We were waiting for Pete so we could all go get some fast food, a post-game tradition. We saw him come out. He was yelling and pointing at someone as he trailed after three other players. He was in the middle of an animated argument with one of the players. The group stopped near the parking lot's curbed edge when a fight broke out between Pete and the guys.

I elbowed Joey. "Hey, your team is arguing about something," I said pointing at the students across the lot.

“What the… come on, let’s check it out.” He took off like a racehorse.

We got to the scuffle in time to hear name-calling along with stray shoves and punches. “That ain’t fucking cool you jackasses!” Pete was red-faced and yelling at a couple of underclassmen.

“The fuck, Pete?” Joey was trying to figure out what was happening. He grabbed one of the sophomore players from behind and pulled him away from Pete. “Calm the fuck down, Jensen! What the hell are you doing picking a fight with a brother?” Realizing it was Joey Crow that had a hold of him, he backed off. Joey took a deliberate look around the group and sized up who was there. “You punks got an issue with Hastings, or are you looking to get your asses kicked off the team?” He’d taken full control of the situation by simply being there.

“These fuckwads are bragging about how they spray-painted the side of Rian Johnson’s car,” Pete said, red and angrier than a wasp, glaring at the younger players.

Rian Johnson was the star of our girls’ basketball team and was being recruited by nearly every major division one college. Stanford and USC both wanted her. She was also an out lesbian.

“That lezbo is planning on bringing some chick to the dance next week,” Tyler Jensen spat, like he was sick to his stomach.

“And?” Joey questioned.

“And that’s fuckin gross!”

“For whom, Jensen? You? You don’t gotta fuck her, so who gives a shit what she does with her own time?”

“It’s gross, Crow. We don’t want none of them at our Homecoming dance.”

Joey was in his face. “You’re a fucking sophomore, Jensen. And even if you were an upperclassman, you ain’t got the right to tell anyone who can and can’t go to a fucking dance.”

“That’s not the half of it, Crow,” Pete started again. “These little guys pricks spray-painted homophobic shit all over her car in the

parking lot today. Real tough guys, you little fucks." He moved toward them again, reaching out, trying to grab Tyler. I glanced over at Joey. He'd had no time or patience for hate speech or harassment of any kind. As a Native American boy in an all-white school in an all-white town, he'd experienced his share. I knew how much these issues bother him and I prepared for his reaction.

His fists were clenched tight as he held them to his sides. His jaw was hard set as he tried to calm himself. His voice was a low angry growl as he said, "Every one of you guys, Jensen, Hanover, Kitzer, you're all fucking done! You wise-asses are off my team, and when I'm done speaking with Coach, not one of you punks will be wearing a jersey come Monday. All you fucking idiots got that?" All three had their heads hanging down as their personal hero, Joey Crow, had just read them the news. "Now get the fuck outta here!" he barked. All three of them walked away without protest, dragging their feet, looking like they'd just witnessed a death.

"Pete, you ok, buddy?" Joey put a hand on his shoulder.

"Yeah, bro. It's cool. That's some bullshit there though."

"You did good Hastings, really good. Thanks for taking a stand, too. It's not always easy to stick up for what's right," Joey said, genuinely admiring his teammate and brother in arms.

"I was getting tired of that shit, Joey. Rian is a cool chick and well… you and Caleb… well, I… you know, care about you guys." He had an earnest look on his face as he stared at Joey.

Joey yanked him in, holding him close and gave him a bear hug, slapping him on the back as guys tend to do. "I love you too, bro. Now, let's get over to Micky-D's for some chow."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: Joey

Two years ago

My grandparents' farm wasn't what most folks around Central Oregon considered a farm. The standard ones around Madras had acres and acres of grasses, hay, and wheat, but the grands let most of their land go wild. They did lease a small portion of their farm to neighboring farmers for grazing livestock, and two neighbors paid to use our land for planting hay. It was a convenient way for them to make money off the farm without truly being farmers themselves.

We had four horses that we cared for and used for recreational riding, and on occasion, my grands would use them in ceremonial events on the reservation. The horses were kept close to the main buildings on a two-acre parcel when not grazing and had their own barn for the colder months. My horse, a gift from the grands, was a stunning American Paint Horse that I'd been riding since I was seven. My father had chosen and ridden Charlie, our Paint, because of the connection to our Native culture and the grands gave him to me when father disappeared. Paint Horses were also referred to as Pintos by the early Indian tribes of what is now known as the United States of America. When grandpa left the reservation, Charlie and his three other horses came to live at the farm. There's a personal relationship that Native Americans have with horses that goes back millennia. My grandpa says it's in his blood and based on his skills around a horse, I would agree.

Besides the main house, we had several other buildings for farm equipment and hay storage. The bulk of the equipment came with the farm when they'd purchased it nine years ago.

"You never know when we might need it," he'd said, after I asked why he never sold the expensive equipment. My grandfather had the wisdom of foresight, probably from one of his visions. *That particular vision would prove to be accurate in the coming years.*

There were also two small cabin-like structures, where seasonal

workers used to stay when the previous owners used the entire three hundred acres for growing crops. The cabins were one-bedroom units that had additional bunks and other basics like a small kitchen and bathroom. Caleb and I'd made one into our private club house in our early teens and would stay overnight whenever we had permission from his folks and my grands.

It was in one of the cabins one summer day that I'd heard a vehicle coming up the long driveway. I was moving furniture around, imagining what it might be like if Caleb and I lived there together, sharing the same bed. I hadn't shared my wish with him just yet because I didn't know how to tell him that I liked him that way. I wasn't quite sure what us living together meant, or whether two guys could share a house and a bed. Although, at sixteen, I did know one thing for sure—I wanted Caleb Hollings as my own.

Brushing aside a dusty cobweb from my face, I peered out the cracked window and spotted a dust cloud settling around an awfully expensive looking car as it came to a stop in the yard. It was too nice of a freshly waxed sedan to be traversing on our pothole ladened driveway. Too bad Caleb wasn't there because it was one of those fancy cars he was always going on about.

A mature and expensively dressed man stepped out of the car and headed for the front porch. Grandpa cut him off as he stepped out the front door to see who had driven up. I couldn't hear their exchange, but I knew grandpa well enough to tell that he wasn't happy to see the man.

Whoever the stranger was, he certainly was out of place in these parts. The car itself was too slick for Madras, but his clothing stood out most to me. *Who wears shiny dress shoes and a fancy suit to a dirty farm?* The stranger was looking around, examining the buildings and mumbling to himself, while grandpa stood on the porch with his arms crossed. Seeing grandpa in his famous arms-crossed-stance made me chuckle. *Good luck, mister.* Those crossed arms had shown themselves to me a few times when he'd been disappointed in my decision-making skills.

The man approached the porch and said a few words I couldn't hear. Grandpa's face was expressionless, dismissing him before he even had a chance to get a full head of steam going. The stranger had no clue he was talking to a wall and wasting his cityfied breath. He reached into his suit jacket to retrieve an envelope and handed it to

grandpa. I watched as he flipped it over in his hands a couple times, shook his head, and handed the envelope back to the guy without opening it. The well-dressed man's face flushed red, unhappy about whatever grandpa had said. A few more words were exchanged, and the fancy man waved his hand in a dismissive way, indicating he disagreed with whatever had just been said.

My shadow accompanied me in the bright sunshine as I walked across the drive toward the house. Mystery man was returning to the now dusty sedan that our barn cat, Killer, had unceremoniously walked across. We met as I passed.

"Hello, young man." He offered me his hand. His face was tight, smooth, and overly tanned. It didn't seem like an entirely natural face, but I couldn't put words to the look. I gave his hand a quick shake and felt grandpa's eyes watching closely. "Tell your dad it's not nice to turn down an extremely good offer for his land."

"He's not my dad, sir. That's my grandpa."

"Where's your daddy then, boy?" he asked, his lips curling at the side.

"I don't know." I sounded weak and wished I was braver to the man that had obviously angered my grandpa.

"You don't know? That seems a bit odd, doesn't it?" He backed away a step and took a moment to examine my face. "Has anyone ever told you that you look just like your grandpa? Interesting… I bet you look just like your daddy too, don't ya boy?" He reached a hand under my chin and tilted my face up to his. "Sad thing about your daddy boy, incredibly sad indeed. Tell your grandaddy that I'll be seeing him around."

Grandpa's boots echoed across the old wooden porch, after he saw the stranger touch me. The man let go of my chin, turned toward the porch and tipped his head in grandpa's direction. Turning back to me, he smiled the wickedest smile I've ever seen on a person.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: Caleb

Now that Joey was back at practice, he immersed himself in getting his timing back and going through drills, so he'd be prepared for Friday's huge game against Redmond High. We were one game back of Redmond in the league standings and with a win, we'd be in the driver's seat for the playoffs.

With all the activities happening at school I barely saw him that week. He practiced late and could not sneak over to my place because he needed plenty of rest. I missed him and it showed. I probably pouted too much, acting childish when he'd had to rush off to practice. I didn't consider myself a clingy boyfriend, but I was sure acting the part.

"I'll make it up to you next weekend, promise." My hurt face was more than he could bear. "I promise," he said, one more time.

We were standing by his locker, and I was still sporting my hurt boyfriend face. It had become nearly impossible to get a few minutes of his time. Between classes and the constant flow of his teammates surrounding the recently returned star, it was bugging me.

"We haven't made out all week, Joey. I'm missing you is all. You don't have a second for me, it seems," I whined.

"Shhh… you might want to say that a bit softer, Angel. I don't want people to think we're arguing." Joey looked around to see who may have heard me. He hated public arguing. He felt it made a relationship seem weak. He took pride in projecting an image of strength in everything he did.

He saw the renewed hurt cross my face, and pulled me into his arms, "I love you, Angel. More than any of this other shit. Just gimme the next few days, ok?" Changing the subject, he said, "What are we wearing to the dance? Why don't we dress up, stud?"

“You’re going to be wearing a crown at the end of the night,” I stated, “so maybe we should look good, huh? Maybe dress up in our Sunday best?”

It was no secret that Joey Crow, senior, football captain, quarterback and all-around school stud would be Homecoming King. “You wanna rent tuxes? Go all out and kill ‘em with our hotness?” he asked, obviously excited about the idea.

“Tuxes? Me too?” I’d never had an occasion to wear a tux.

“Well of course! You want everyone thinking my boyfriend can’t keep up with his King?”

I rolled my eyes at him, and he gave my neck a quick squeeze then begged off so he could get to practice. I watched as he got about five feet away and stopped. He turned around with a big smile. “How about this, can you meet me after practice? Maybe we take a quick drive out to the airport?” My heart skipped a beat, surging with happiness at the offer. The small local airport was where we all hung out when we wanted to get some private time with our girls or boyfriends. You could park your car alongside the fence that separated the runway from the road, and then get handsy as you watched the rare takeoff or landing at the tiny rural airport.

“Is that code for I’m getting my make out session?” I grinned.

“That’s code for ‘I’ll be freshly showered. You do what you want with me.”’

“Deal! See you at 5:30.” My hurt feelings duly dissolved.

Friday heralded the big game followed by the dance in the gym on Saturday night. Every year on Homecoming Friday, the school had a big pep rally in the gymnasium with teachers and coaches giving speeches, Homecoming Royal Court announcements, and honoring the senior class players. The captain of the team always gave a rousing speech at the end of the ceremony to get the team and the school riled up for the upcoming game. Joey had been captain as a junior too but chose not to speak last year because he wanted the senior quarterback, his backup that year, to get that privilege.

Joey and I met at his locker and headed to the gym together. It was packed with six hundred plus students from all four grades.

Streamers and banners that proclaimed us *unbeatable, the toughest, and conference champions to be* dotted the gym. The band was playing all the favorite fight songs as the cheer squad danced on the floor casting flirtatious glances at the players. I was going to sit with some of our friends who, like me, were not committed to the team or cheered and didn't have to sit on the gym floor. Our closest friends Pete and Charity were both in the rally; Pete a football player and Charity, the head cheerleader, a fact she rarely missed letting you know.

Joey looked like the star of his team in his jersey with *Captain* sewed onto the shoulder of his jersey, and some new, very tight Levi's he'd purchased for the rally. He had let his hair go free of his ponytail today and it added to his exotic look.

When we walked into the full gym, a roar came up from the crowd and they began to yell 'CROW! CROW! CROW! CROW!' It was tradition at Madras High to bring the quarterback into the gym with his name being chanted and the students had been awaiting his arrival. I was taken aback because I'd forgotten about this particular tradition. I immediately started retreating out of the spotlight, but Joey was having none of it and reached out, pulling me right back to his side. He stopped and raised a hand to acknowledge the student body. He smiled wide as he did his best to convey modesty and embarrassment at the spectacle.

He leaned into my ear and whispered. "Get ready, Angel, I have a surprise coming and I wanted you to know ahead of time. I have some things to say that I think the student body needs to hear." I stepped back to study his face. His smile did nothing to lessen the fearful expression on my face. He gave my arm a loving squeeze. "It's gonna be ok," he mouthed, and headed to his chair on the gym floor with the rest of the team. I stood motionless, watching, worrying before I found a place in the bleachers.

The principal gave updates on the schedule of events and a few teachers offered support to the team. After the boring speeches, the cheer squad took the floor to perform a routine where they introduced each senior class member of the team. Joey wasn't included in the cheer team's routine because he was expected to take the lectern and give an address to the entire school after the cheerleaders finished. Charity had a special plan for Pete and got to do his cheer for him. When his name was announced, she bounced over and planted a huge kiss on his lips. The school went nuts of course and the cheer team advisor frowned miserably. She crossed her arms in disappointment,

adjusting her sleeves while maintaining her sour expression of disapproval.

Our student body president, Amy James, made her way to the podium and the crowd quieted down. Everyone knew the Royal Court would be announced now. Eight girls and eight boys had been earlier nominated to the Court and voted on by the student body. I'd received a nomination too that was posted earlier in the week, but knew I'd never make the top four. Only jocks made it that far and I knew it was Joey's anyways, so I was happy. Amy held the final four names for both genders and would be announcing those students. The King and Queen would be announced at the dance on Saturday night. The names read were the usual group of A-list students, cheerleaders, athletes and an occasional student that had worked hard for the school on things like fundraisers or school beautification. It was no surprise to anyone that Joey was announced as part of the Court. Joey and Pete were both on it, and of course Charity was too. I almost believed Charity's amazed and shocked look when her name was announced. The real shock would've been her face if she hadn't been nominated.

After all the pomp of announcing Royal Court, it was time for the star of the football team to make his speech. The speech had to be rousing to pump up the team. The captain would usually speak of brotherhood and bonding, thank his teammates and then lead a cheer with the student body. Coach took to the podium, planning to introduce the starting quarterback for Homecoming. It was no secret who it was, but it was an honor and tradition to bestow the title of starter at the school pep rally.

Coach Roberts gave up on an announcement, he'd been drowned out the moment Joey stood up. Once again, the chants began, "Crow! Crow! Crow! Crow!"

Joey smiled and raised a hand to accept the warmth from the student body and approached the lectern. He dropped his smile as he adjusted the microphone and replaced it with a more serious look than I had expected. I felt the lump in my throat drop to the pit of my gut. Butterflies had arrived and I felt nervous at what might be coming. I didn't understand why he hadn't spoken to me about the surprise.

He stood at the podium and allowed the chants to continue as the band played the school fight song. He looked strong and proud as

he stood gazing into the crowd. At an inch over six foot, shoulders held high, and his long, straight, black hair loosely hanging over his jersey, he was in command of the massive gymnasium. Every girl in the gym was staring at Joey with blank, starry-eyed desire. Even the guys were on their feet yelling his name and admiring one of their own, wanting to be him, I supposed. The song ended and he once again reached out to adjust the mic to his height. He must be as nervous as I felt. The gymnasium went silent, and we all expectantly stared at the star of the show.

"Geesh, thanks everyone for the awesome welcome. I love you too." The crowd hung on his every word and erupted at his opening line. He let them get rowdy for another sixty seconds. "I had a rousing speech planned for all of you today, but I would very much appreciate being able to take a minute and share something that is important to me." He took a deep breath and pulled his shoulders back, standing tall, the jittering nerves subsiding. "I'm aware that I have a certain privilege at this school because of a talent that I possess. My father was also the starting quarterback at our high school, and I've been reminded that he'd had an even greater talent than my own." His voice choked slightly at the mention of his father. "We both enjoyed great notoriety at this school, despite being men of color." The student body became noticeably quiet, not sure what was about to happen. "I've always wondered if my time at our school would have been different if I didn't have the ability to play football. Would all of you still cheer for me? Would I have been nominated to Royal Court? Would an Indian boy from the local reservation be popular?"

The teachers and coaches were squirming and looking at each other. Charity sought me out from the floor and gave me a quizzical look, and mouthed, *'What's up?'* I lifted my shoulders, widened my eyes, and shook my head *no*, confused as she was.

"I consider all of you my friends. Some of you I don't know well, but I've tried my hardest to respect you and encourage each of you to be the best you that you can be. I try hard every day to be the best that I can be. My grandfather instilled that desire in me as a child, and as a leader in this school, I'm afforded respect and am an admired member of this student body. I appreciate that fact every day. However, with that said, I feel I have a personal obligation to share my hopes for this school and for each student in it." You could have heard a pin drop across the gym. "I want to address something that happened last week, right here at our school. One of the valued members of our student body, also an athlete, had her car vandalized

in the student parking lot. It's not just the fact that one or more of our very own students vandalized a fellow student's car. It was the message left on her car that was sad and disappointing to me. What we did as a group was personal and unacceptable." A murmur spread across the gym as students continued eyeing each other trying to figure out what Joey meant. "Rian is a friend of mine and I respect her as a fellow athlete. I admire the level of talent that she has on the basketball court. But most of all, I respect Rian's personal life and the choices she makes for her own happiness. I don't want anyone of you to be unhappy or alone in your struggles. I'm standing here for every one of you that feels you're not seen or heard. I have an important opportunity and I plan to use it today." Now every student in attendance was trying to see where Rian was seated in the stands. I caught her inching toward the end of the bleacher where she sat, and it appeared that she was headed for the exit. "Rian, please stay. I want all of us to hear what I have to say, especially you." She stopped and put her face in her hands. "What happened to Rian and to her car is not acceptable on any level at this school. You have no problem cheering her on when she plays her heart out for our basketball team. Rian is a part of our school so why can't we cheer her personal choices as well? Why can't we celebrate her for being the wonderful person she has always been to all of you and to me personally? I think we have space in our school to cheer for every student." The entire student body sat on edge as Joey continued. "I know what it feels like, not fitting in. I've grown up being that kid, the one that doesn't look like the rest of you, and like many of you, I'm second generation at this school. However, I can't tell you how my father felt about his time at this school. We all know why that is, but still, I'm left to wonder, if he hadn't also been an athlete, would he have been treated the way my people are treated on a regular basis? I hope he wasn't bullied because I'm not treated poorly by you. I'm respected and loved because of what you all think I can do for our school." I felt the tears streaming down my face as he spoke so bravely and noticed the looks of the other students as they stared down at the gym floor. They weren't comfortable, but they were listening.

"Rian, I want to ask you to please come to our school dance. I want you and the person you love to feel welcome and respected as part of our community. It's important for me to stand alongside you while I'm at the same dance because I'll need your support as well, when I show up with the person I love, Caleb Hollings." There was a buzz spreading like fire in the stands after Joey made his declaration. Students whispered and tried to find me in the crowd. Joey remained standing, waiting for the gymnasium to quiet down. He'd made his

point. A smile spread across his face. “Oh! And one more thing.” He raised his fist proudly. “I promise you, we will kick Redmond High’s asses!”

Nothing. The gymnasium was silent. The teachers remained in their seats. The students looked at each other, questioning what they’d just heard. Joey walked back to his chair. Rian was the first student on her feet. She stood alone and began to clap, tears falling from her face, and one by one, the other students stood and clapped. The response exploded throughout the gym, and even the teachers stood and began to smile at one another. Once again, the room erupted in a passionate wave of applause as the cheers began again, ‘CROW! CROW! CROW! CROW!’

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: Landon

The young hitchhiker, the reason for the tingle in my nuts, was a quarter mile back. I continued gazing into my rearview mirror, watching him get tinier. I glanced at the clock on the dash, it read a quarter past one. *Yeah, I've got plenty of time.* I had a scheduled meeting with Veronica at seven, so some nasty sex squeezed perfectly into my schedule—definitely what the doctor ordered. I spotted a side road and pulled over, turned around and headed back in his direction. I was correct—he did have that hitchhiker *Thelma and Louise* Brad Pitt look. I honked and pulled over and watched as he jogged up to my car. I was returning from the small town of Sisters, Oregon, on highway twenty, where I'd scoped out some property for future development near the ski resort my old man was interested in. The boring business trip was about to get a heck of a lot better. I rolled down the passenger side window as he walked up. "Where ya headed?" he asked. Up close the boy looked to be about 20 years old. He had a stocking cap pulled strategically around his stunning face, shaggy, dirty blonde hair sticking out.

"Bend, I'm heading home. Need a lift?"

"That'd be cool man, it's freezing out here."

"Toss your backpack in the backseat and we'll get you warmed up," I said, my eyes examining him closely as he opened the back door. He peeled off a heavier jacket, revealing a tight ski sweater clinging to a thin, rangy body, and left it on the seat with his backpack.

"Thanks for stopping man, I'm not sure I could've walked all the way back to Bend," he said, appreciatively, and then explained to me how some buddies had deserted him at the ski resort over an issue about gas money. "I'm in between jobs so cash is tight."

"Shit happens, I get it dude." I decided to act blasé and cool, hoping to connect with the delicious ski dude.

“Doesn’t look like you suffer much. What is this, a hundred-k?” He glanced around, checking out the interior of my X5.

“Not quite, but I do all right.” He pulled his stocking cap off, revealing a full head of ski bum hair. It was tangled and matted but looked fucking perfect to me. His skinny jeans barely hung on nonexistent hips and exposed a huge lump under his belt buckle. My cock stirred as I imagined wrapping my lips around the secret in his jeans.

“So, what are you doing on this stretch of boring highway?” he asked, warmed up and pulling his sweater over his head, revealing a tee shirt that was also sliding up, and an insanely tight midsection. His obliques stood out prominently above the low-slung jeans.

“I had a business errand back at Sisters. Just heading home now, looking to kill some time before another meeting later,” I revealed, fishing for a bite.

He took a long hard look at my face before sliding his gaze down to my crotch. “Whatcha got in mind?”

It was totally on. I punched the gas pedal and merged onto the highway, preparing for my next adventure with this outdoorsy, surf and ski bum hunk.

Wannabe Brad stepped into the room. He was naked, obviously not modest, while his oversized dick flung from hip to hip as he strode toward me, sitting near my feet at the end of the cheap bed. I’d gotten a room at a sleazy motel off the highway, and he’d asked to shower since he’d been walking for three hours.

Thirty minutes ago, still in my car, he said, “You get us a room, smoke me out and give me a hundred bucks and you can have your way with me.” He grinned wide and slid a hand down to his rising cock. So, there I was again, getting ready for some sexy piece of ass I’d picked up on the road.

“Fire up another blunt. I want a buzz going since I don’t do guy on guy often, but you’re a quality piece of ass, so I’ll make an exception.” He ran his hand over the top of my naked thigh. My dick stirred from his touch, a nasty grin spread across his face, suggesting he might be a

bit more accustomed to guy on guy than he was admitting. We proceeded to smoke some fine weed I kept in a small duffel I'd brought in. It held all my road goodies in it. I never knew what I'd bump into on the highway or a construction site.

"I don't suck dick, but you can suck mine. I don't get fucked, but I'm willing to fuck you," he began. *Yeah, this wasn't something he did much. Whatever.*

"Then get up here and put your cock in my mouth," I growled. If this waif wanted to get mouthy, two could play his game.

He straddled my chest and placed his nut sack right on my chin. "Suck on those for a second," he ordered, reaching back and grabbing my raging hard on, squeezing it while I inhaled his nuts. I had a hold of his scrawny hips, staring up at a very thin, but ripped stomach. His smooth body had zero fat on it. He was lean and lightly muscled. Ten pounds less and I might have been concerned.

He placed his hands above my head, coming to all fours, positioning his massive meat directly over my face. He dangled the blood-filled schlong, swinging it across my mouth, daring me to attempt a sword swallowing. He was going to be incredibly surprised; I didn't have a gag reflex. I left my hands by my side and opened wide as he slid his cock past my lips. I watched his eyes as he dipped it in, an inch at a time, my eyes never leaving his. After the first six inches, he widened his eyes in surprise and grinned.

"You think you got all this?" he asked, glancing down at his cock, referring to the next four inches still exposed.

I smiled the best I could with a slab of meat choking my throat and he kept feeding me. He slid in and out of my throat, face fucking me as I milked him. "Yeah fucker, that feels good. You know what you're doing, dontcha?" he moaned, his rhythm was getting more aggressive as his lithe body arched in pleasure. "Fuuucckkk, what a mouth dude. Jayzus! You feel so good on my dick… it feels… so good, baby." His eyes were glassing over, and he was struggling not to shoot too soon. "Whoa, whoa… hang on a sec," he pleaded. I paused; his dick still embedded in my throat. "I better slow down, give you your monies worth," he added.

He pulled his cock out of my mouth and turned around, facing the opposite direction and placed his ass in my face. "You want this

eaten?" I asked nastily, adding a warning. "If I start munching on this, you're probably gonna get fucked, just so you know."

He bent forward and his smooth, small ass, hard as a fucking rock, spread wide, revealing a perfectly pink pucker. *I thought he'd said he didn't get fucked.* "You don't scare me," he spat, leaning forward and taking my cock into his mouth, inhaling it in one swift motion. I guessed that was my answer.

I grabbed a handful of tender cheek in each hand and stuck my tongue directly into his ass. He pushed back hard against my mouth and murmured his pleasure through a mouthful of cock. His earlier denial of what he was willing to do had made me hot as fuck, so I buried my face in his ass as he continued blowing me like an expert.

His mouth felt fantastic as he slobbered over my cock, massaging my balls and moaning like he hadn't eaten in a month. From the look of his lean frame, maybe he'd been living on a diet of dick. My balls sent a signal that I'd better decide what was next on this ride, so I placed a finger against his entrance and waited for a possible rejection.

"Fuck yeah man, put it in there," he moaned. I grabbed his cock and yanked on it while moving my finger over his pucker. Placing two fingers into my mouth, I wet them generously and pressed them to his entrance again, this time pushing until I broke through. He was tight but accommodating, so I pushed further.

His back arched and he moved back on my fingers, bucking his hips, never taking his mouth off my cock. I was getting closer to blasting and decided to reposition my surprisingly skilled and willing stud. "Hang on, will ya. Move forward, I'm going to slide out from under you, but stay on all fours," I commanded.

He did as told and dropped his face to the mattress at the end of the bed, his ass still up and in my face, begging to be used. "I'm going to fuck your sweet ass boy, you sure you want this?" I asked. It was obvious the punk wanted to be fucked, but he'd said he didn't do such things, so a verbal confirmation would be nice.

"I said put your cock in my ass dude, you need a fucking map or what?"

That was all I needed to hear. I leaned over the edge of the bed,

grabbing the small duffel and reached into a side pocket, where all my goodies were stored. I stretched a condom over my swollen shaft and stroked a generous amount of lube over it. Squeezing a fair amount more onto two fingers, I spread it over his hole.

"I like to be plowed hard dude, don't fucking dick around back there, give it to me hard," he snarled. "I want it rough." *Loud and clear, Brad!*

I slid my fingers in and lubed his entrance good and then pressed my swollen head against his entrance, pausing for a few seconds before ramming in hard. "Fuck yeah! That's it, rich boy, drill me good, do *not* let up." His voice low and guttural. He started moaning like he was trapped in a pleasure zone of his own making. *What a fucking liar.*

I grabbed his slim hips and yanked him back and onto my dripping rod, making sure I was at maximum depth on each drive. "This what you want, boy? This feel good in your hot ass?" I was delirious and intoxicated with lust, thinking about how he'd fooled me into thinking it'd just be oral, and he'd split.

"Yeah… yeah… yeah… that's it, that's it." He had his horse hung cock in his hand, jacking it hard as I pounded into him, long hard stroke after long hard stroke, splitting his already small ass in half. "Come on stud… keep fucking that ass dude, come on!" he yelled, obviously losing his mind with the pleasure he felt from being drilled. *I needed to meet more dudes that said they didn't get fucked if this was the reality.* I loved watching my thick cock slamming in and out of his hard little ass. He was taking it like a champ, his head buried in the bedspread, long sinewy muscles on his back, stretched and fully visible, begging me to pound the fuck outta him.

He continued pumping his cock while his head was buried in his other arm, moaning in pleasure as he spat out raunchier pleasurable nothings. "That's it… there you go. Dude, you're hitting my spot, yes… pound me, hit that spot… right there… harder. Oh… fuuucckkk… that's it, hit it… hit it… yeah, fuuucckkk." He was writhing and yapping, and I knew he was close. I was pounding his ass and slamming against that sweet spot guys have in their assholes. I knew what was up, I'd been there, several ridiculously hot times.

"You want my load punk?"

“Hell yes, I said harder, you fucker, fuck it into me, come on… harder!” He lifted his head off the bed and threw it back, arching his ass up so I could get inside deeper. I brought one of my knees up, placing a foot on the bed, keeping the other knee in place. Grabbing a fistful of shaggy hair, I yanked his head back, needing maximum angle to drill this slim dick rider.

“You better start milking that dick boy, cause I’m about to fill you up,” I warned.

He tugged faster on his meat and kept his smooth, slightly tanned ass right in my sweet spot. “I’m getting close dude, keep pounding. Fuuucckkk, you’re on my spot again, faster, faster… come on, go… harder.” He was yelling through clenched teeth, obviously beside himself with raw pleasure.

“Here we go, punk,” I grunted. I grabbed his hips and held tight as I shifted gears, hitting maximum thrust and rocketed deep into him, over and over, building my climax. “Uhhh, yeah,” I yelled, “here it is… here it is!” I held his hips in place as I deposited my seed deep in his sweet honey hole. He bucked and let out a low, pleasure driven moan as he shot all over the bedspread.

I fell on top of him, cock still in his ass, sweating and breathing hard. “That was some shit there, dude.” His muffled words stroking my ego. “Thanks for picking me up, man. I’d have hated to miss that. You’re one great fuck, dude. Forget the money, I was just bullshitting you; it’s how I like to get myself worked up.”

“Acting like a hooker gets you off?” I laughed.

“Yeah, you got a problem with it stud?” He lifted his head back and tilted it against my face, breathing hard against my ear. “And… picking up punks on the side of the road and fucking them in shitty hotels… that your thing?”

“Touché!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: Landon

All anyone could talk about was the news story that aired about the couple found in a shallow grave outside of Bend. I'd spoken with Veronica a couple of times since, and she had me starting to believe that my dad could be involved. He'd surrounded himself with high priced representation and continued working as if everything was normal. He ignored the news reporters, banned the press from his offices and went about his affairs as if everything was peachy keen. *Never let them see you sweat* was his personal mantra.

I kept my mouth shut around him so as not to arouse suspicion about my concerns. He'd been in a particularly shitty mood lately. Shittier than the usual foul mood when things weren't going his way. He continued bitching about the county not helping him change an ordinance. He hated dealing with what he referred to as *'The Suits'*.

Changing the water rights laws and accessibility to land near the Cove Palisades were his top priorities. The access was much needed to feed his mega resort. The county was making things difficult, and I imagined he'd have to apply more pressure somewhere. Ronnie had asked me to meet her at her workplace later that night, and insisted I not mention it to anyone, especially my dad.

I spotted Ronnie's car at the county building and parked beside it. She'd asked me to text her so she could buzz me in to the records department on the fourth floor. The government building was one every city had—nondescript six story rectangle with loads of tinted windows surrounded by a few hundred parking spots.

Landon: *I'm here*.

Veronica: *K, go to 4, meet u at door in hall.*

The elevator door dinged, announcing my arrival on the fourth floor, where I found Ronnie standing right outside.

“Shit girl! You fucking scared me.”

“Chill out queen and be quiet while we’re in here. I wanna show you something I came across yesterday while I was pulling records and logging some plans in the system.”

“Jesus Ron! You’ve been acting all secretive and spy-like every time we speak these days. What are you up to?”

“You’re my bestie, Landon, and I don’t want anything to happen to you, but I have some seriously crazy shit to show you.” She paused for dramatic effect. “I think your dad is a fucking crook.” *Well, that was subtle.* She turned and headed down the hall, heels clacking on the sterile grey tile. I almost felt too sick to my stomach to follow her. I knew how she was when she got her teeth into something, and we weren’t talking dick here.

She held her electronic badge to the keypad and the click from the door confirmed her clearance to the secure records division. The room included row after row of file cabinets and at every four rows stood a small desk with a computer on it.

“What is all this stuff?”

“Records, plats, and land ownership recordings, shit like that. All new permits or changes to land usage rules are recorded and stored here. I can access committee notes and regulations regarding those permits as well as county zoning,” she said, all professional, and showcasing it by sticking a pen into the bun tightly riding her scalp.

“Snooze fest! God! Your job is sooooo boring, kiddo,” I whined.

“Fuck off, grab that chair over there and sit next to me.” I slid the hard plastic office chair next to hers.

Veronica plugged a few digits on the keyboard to access the computer in front of us.

“Why can’t we do this shit from your office and have a drinky poo at the same time?” I moaned, sagging my shoulders like a four-year-old.

“These computers are kept in strict lockdown and can only be accessed by approved staff, while seated in this room.” She rolled her

eyes at me like I was an idiot. “Only certain security level employees have access to the files stored here because of privacy concerns. I can literally change county policy or even raise your property taxes from here if I wanted too,” she stated.

“Why is it you always whisper when I feel like you’re about to drop a bomb on me?”

“I don’t know, this fucking room could be bugged, dipshit, and besides, I probably shouldn’t be in here.”

My mouth dropped and I crossed my arms, surprised by her blasé attitude. “Oh cool, nice time to mention that tidbit,” I said, looking over my shoulder, wondering what shit I’d gotten involved in.

Ronnie navigated from page to page, and I watched as several official looking letters and drawings flew by as her fingers typed away. She was an efficient bitch, that was obvious. She stopped and cautiously looked around, up and down the long aisles.

“What the fuck, Veronica?”

“Maybe I’m making a mistake, you being your dads’ son and all. How do I know you won’t rat my ass out when I show it to you?”

“You don’t! So maybe you shouldn’t?”

“Fuck you, Landon! I’m serious here. You want to see what I found or not?” She looked freaked out.

“If it helps you at all, I don’t think my old man is innocent about a lot of shit. If you’ve found something bad about him, it would be par for the course. So, whoop dee fuckin doo, same shit, different day from my viewpoint.”

She pulled up some notes from a county meeting and stopped there. She explained that it was a petition submitted to the county as a request from Alexander Development Inc. The notes said that my dad’s company had petitioned the county to change some of the guidelines for sharing water rights with landowners as well as any future developments in certain farming areas. ‘*DENIED’* was stamped across the letter in red. It was dated a year prior.

“See this? Your father’s company was denied approval on this

permit request to have water rights around the Cove Project. Virtually every landowner there complained about him having any right to their water."

"And? I've already heard about this business, it's old news."

"Hang on to your jock strap, and looky here. This is the report of denial, and a new report that was filed last month after that church meeting you and I attended."

Yeah, I remembered the meeting vividly. I remembered how fucking hot farm boy looked when he basically told me to pound sand. He just added another layer of lust to my already full desire for his sweet ass.

She pulled up a new page that looked remarkably like the last report. She zoomed into the signature section on the page. "Look very closely at that signature. This guy, Henderson, is the county projects manager. You see any *DENIED* stamped anywhere on this one?" She gazed at me intently.

"Uh, no," I whispered, looking alarmed at the revelation.

"That's because this new letter has been added to permanent records, and it changes all findings from the original report that was issued last year. Only one person has that kind of authority at county, and that's Henderson." She pursed her lips, scrunching her brows together. I knew she was in super spy mode.

"What does this mean, exactly?" I gulped.

She had my attention now. "This permit has its usual filing fee code attached to it. Most people wouldn't recognize that these codes had any real importance to the permit, because they're used instead of actual dollar amounts. They're pre-set for ease of entry to our internal systems, but… I am well versed in these codes, and I know how to compare them to financial recordings within the system." She placed her chin between her thumb and index finger, raising her brows again, questioning whether I was following her summation.

"I always knew you were smarter than you had a right to be. So, I suppose this involves my dad somehow?"

"I went down to the financial department yesterday and had a

friend—you remember the redhead that fucked me good at last year's Christmas party?" she said, suddenly chipper.

"Mm hmm," I answered, mildly disturbed at the memory.

"I had him look this up for me."

I was still dwelling on the red-headed dude. "I hate gingers," I hissed.

"He has a huge dick, darling."

"Still though, ewww."

"Never mind, it doesn't matter one shit. Anyways, I asked him to pair the code fee to the report for me because I didn't recognize this code right here." Ronnie pointed to the bottom of the page, where all the small legalese is written on these types of forms. "Now keep in mind, I'm certain that this kind of permit change would normally only cost about a G, tops. However, Mr. Big Schlong tells me the filing fee attached to this was fifty-k." She tapped the screen with an expensive nail as an exclamation point.

"What the fuck?" I let out incredulously. I placed my fingers on my temples and pressed. I was beginning to see where this was going.

"That's not all. My fuck buddy told me that the fee wasn't deposited into the usual county accounts for tracking all receivables. This one was transferred into a management discretionary fund that no one seems to know a damn thing about." She moved her head up and down, gawking at me to see if I was getting her point.

"That… sounds… crooked as shit."

I admired little Miss Nancy Drew and her investigative skills. "Now, let's get back to Mr. Henderson, our signer of the new permit changes. He shows up to work last week with a new sports car. Keep in mind, this is the same cheap ass that has driven a beat-up Ford truck for the last twenty-five fucking years!"

"That doesn't prove shit, Ronnie!" I said, defensively, "You know that."

"I do know that, Landon, so… that's where you come in," she

leaned in close. I was sure I looked freaked as fuck.

"What? What part do I have in your scary undercover bullshit plot of doom?"

She turned the computer off and faced me. "You, my sweet little friend, are going to do some sleuthing of your own."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: JOEY

Homecoming Friday, Saturday's dance, and the weekend that followed were a complete blur. So much had happened and almost all of it was good. I got crowned Homecoming King and Pete's girlfriend, Charity, was our Queen. Truth be told, I'd wished Pete would've been King, it would've been cool for the school's Ken and Barbie.

Rian had showed up to the dance with her girlfriend, who turned out to be a student from Redmond High. Caleb and I invited them to join our group and they fit right in. I'll admit, I had a stereotypical idea of how Rian's crosstown rival girlfriend might look, but I had been completely off on that read. I'd sort of expected another girl jock, not Little Miss Rodeo. Tiffany was a knockout with perfect skin, killer smile, and a body that turned heads. Lucky Rian! She wore the sexiest little black dress with hot pink cowboy boots. She also had a trucker's mouth, so naturally, I loved her. If I'd been blessed with a sister, this chick was the one I wanted. I winked at Rian; she knew her girlfriend was a catch.

Tiffany came over to introduce herself. "Hi Joey. I'm Tiffany, Rian's girlfriend. I've heard a lot about you and your assembly speech. You should know, you're my personal hero."

"Thanks, it wasn't a big deal," I said, humbled by her appreciative words.

"It was a big deal for Rian, took huge balls to do what you did," she said.

The big reveal about my relationship with Caleb hadn't caused the shock I'd believed it would. I guess after eleven years, people assumed Caleb and I were just that, together.

The real reveal happened on Saturday at the dance. And boy, it was a doozy. Jaylen Ross, my nemesis and backup quarterback, decided to show up at the dance with his boyfriend, a former team

member. Who could've imagined that? The strength it took for him to show up at the dance with a dude had earned major props from me. Maybe my point about being accepting and living an authentic life affected some actual change. Jaylen and I spoke at length about our competitive years on the team and all the bullshit we'd put each other through since seventh grade. Turns out, he was an ok dude after all.

"Dude, I'm embarrassed about the bullshit I caused in the locker room," he began, "and, I'm sorry too, bro. I was just jealous about a lot of shit. You got the starting job, and your boyfriend is so fucking hot." He glanced across the table where Charity was sitting in Caleb's lap, teasing him about his insanely muscular body. "I wished I had your ability to not give a fuck about people's shit." He was still gazing at my boyfriend. "Dude, I totally get your choice of farm boy. He's definitely the hottest guy at school." I suggested he not share that with Todd North, former teammate to us both and the guy he'd showed up with.

I had also kept the promise I made at the pep rally, easily beating Redmond High. Our team ended up going undefeated the balance of the year and that left us at 8-3 for the season. We won our five-team division and made it to playoffs. Madras was on fire with the excitement of another possible state run. I couldn't go anywhere without folks picking up my tab or stopping me for a few minutes to cheer me on and offer any insight they had on our next opponent.

Mr. Johansson spotted me filling the Honda at the local 76 and came over for a chat. "You took it to 'em, Joey. Damn, your daddy would be so darn proud of ya!"

"Thank you, sir."

I shook his hand and just like before in the stadium, he held onto it. "So, what's your plan with Hendersonville?"

"I'll leave that up to Coach, sir. We haven't sat through the films yet. You got any advice?" He certainly knew his local ball.

"Keep an eye on that damn near seven-footer in their backfield. He'll pick your back pocket if you don't pay attention," he advised.

"Gotcha! You're speaking about Hooper, sir. Trust me, I won't be throwing his direction, at least not till I can!" I gave him a wink, like we'd shared a secret.

“I swear young man, it’s like looking at your daddy all over again.” He had a distant look in his eyes.

“Thank you, sir… you know… for thinking of my dad and all. It means a lot to me, you keeping him alive in your thoughts.” I couldn’t help smiling as I thought about my dad and I, both leading our schools to victory.

Since we’d won our division outright, there’d be no tiebreaker game before districts, so I had an extra week to prepare. Caleb came over and we rearranged the barn, clearing out the middle, so we could set up enough space to run some drills. He’d tossed a half dozen bales of cheap straw in his Jeep and we used those for our corners and out of bounds markers. Like his barn, ours was huge inside with a high ceiling, half of it a loft. It was perfectly suited for throwing a football around, and the only warm, dry space available for practicing because the Central Oregon winter had us in its frozen grip.

The grands were at the reservation, having dinner with a much happier and divorced Aunt Teddy. She’d gotten rid of Jack, completed a third stint at rehab and was doing well. We were all proud of her efforts at getting her life back. It was an incredibly sad and serious problem that many families deal with, but her hard work had made the grands exceptionally proud.

“Now do the proper three-step drop, set your feet, and I’ll head straight down the middle. Do *not* release until I decide on the corner I am going to cut to. Got it?” he said.

Apparently, Caleb had decided he was head coach material. “You’re so goddamned hot right now, stud. How am I supposed to concentrate with you in those shorts?” I palmed the football, gazing hungrily at the outline in his shorts.

“I’m not fooling around, mister, let’s go!”

I dropped back, as his sexy ass jetted straight down the middle of the barn. He faked a left turn, and I released the ball, a mistake. “Fuck dude,” I hollered. I’d miscalculated his cut.

“You just got picked off, Crow.”

He stood on the other end of the barn, out of breath, pointing at the ball laying on the left side of our faux field. “I called fox 56, dude!” I yelled, stomping around like a child.

“I know that, but that play has the option to run out of double coverage if the receiver feels threatened. You know the plays, Joey, come on!”

“Goddamn it!” I slammed my thigh hard and kicked the dirt floor, spraying bits of gravel and dirt everywhere. I hung my head down feeling like an idiot. “Fuck man! I suck!”

He jogged from the other end of the barn and put a hand on my shoulder. “Hey, come on, relax man, you know this stuff.” He didn’t have to help me; he was doing it because he loved me. He wanted me to succeed, like always, and I needed to relax.

“It doesn’t help that you’re so fucking hot in those shorts, dude.” I made the same excuse and continued staring at his sweaty tee shirt and buff arms. He moved closer and wrapped his arms around my waist, his fingers locking behind my back. He placed a kiss on the crook of my neck, and then pulled back, giving me a slightly threatening look.

“Hang on, *Crow*, you’re calling me *dude,* way too much. Maybe this’ll help your concentration.” He put his mouth on mine and gently nibbled on my lips. “This better?” he mumbled.

We were standing under a large light that hung in the middle of the barn, making our shadows twenty feet tall against the dirt floor. He had me in his arms and was invading my mouth with his tongue. He’d obviously been taking notes from our previous make out sessions. I placed my hands on his damp hair and brought his face to mine. He overpowered me and lifted me off the ground, carrying me across the barn and toward the blue tarp that covered bales of feed hay for our horses. I’d forgotten how strong he was. He’d picked a hundred and sixty pounds off the ground like a sack of groceries. I instinctively wrapped my legs around his waist, letting go of my free will and kissed him. The tight jock I had under loose sweatpants, constrained my growing cock. My butt cheeks bounced off his knees, keeping time with each step he took across the expanse of the barn.

Caleb placed me on the edge of the plastic tarp, not once taking his mouth off mine, and gently laid me back, straddling me in a

pushup position. I pulled him down to me and felt his hard-on through the thin silk basketball shorts. He pressed it into mine and we began to grind back and forth. He was possessed, his face giving nothing away. He had my arms tightly on my sides, keeping them in place with his knees, unwilling to give up control. *What's this, church boy?*

If this hadn't been Caleb, I would've been scared shitless. My boyfriend could literally break me in half if he chose to. "I love you," he whispered, slightly breathless. "I know you've been trying hard to be patient with me regarding our… uh… sexy time, but I'm warning you, I want you and I'm tired of waiting." He stared at my body. Lying underneath him, I couldn't recall seeing his sky-blue eyes so focused, so determined. He placed his hands on the tarp next to my head to support his weight as he hovered over me. He slowly lifted his left hand and balanced his weight on the other while sliding his free hand into my sweats. My eyes widened from the unexpected, yet welcome surprise, but I remained silent. I had zero intention of slowing this trip down with any kind of interruption. He gripped my cock, still encased inside my jockstrap and rubbed from the tip of my boner to underneath my balls.

"Jesus…" I moaned, shifting my hips from side to side. He stared down at me, watching my reaction intently. In one swift instant he had come to his knees between my legs and had my sweats pulled down to my ankles. I lay there, exposed. My sweaty tank top was pushed halfway up my stomach, and my jock was in full view. He tapped one of my legs and motioned for me to extract it from the sweats. I guessed he wanted a wide-angle view. I did as his finger demanded and didn't take my eyes from his. I was thrilled, scared, and horny as fuck. I had no idea what he was up to, he'd never taken the lead before.

I lay still as he lustfully scanned my body, examining every inch of my almost naked self. I gazed dreamily at him as he brought his mouth down to my bare stomach, slowly moving his lips across my abs. I remembered how he liked to draw outlines of my abs with his fingers. The new and aggressive Caleb was doing the same, but with his tongue. I grabbed his head, threading my fingers through his damp hair, my hips rising as he half tickled, half drove me crazy with his breath on my stomach.

Closing my eyes, I let my thoughts and feelings run free while he moaned a low moan of ecstasy. His hands came up on the inside of my thighs, one agonizing inch at a time while his eyes remained

focused on my abs. His hand reached the stretched-out pouch of my jock that contained a heavily swollen dick, and he lifted the fabric up to release my junk. He left my jock on, but managed to free my cock and balls from the mesh and was rubbing his hand over it. I didn't dare open my eyes and risk the possibility that he'd stop what he was doing. He'd never done anything like this before and I sure as hell didn't want to freak him out.

Gripping my hard on, he pulled it upright and held it there. I took a quick peek. He had a distant look in his eyes, like he was deciding on his next move. Stunning me, he moved his lips over the tip and slowly brought it into his mouth. My body tensed and I clenched my eyes shut. I wanted to look down but was afraid he'd be embarrassed. *He has my cock in his mouth.* My mind raced. I felt a hand come down on my stomach that led to a soothing and gentle stroking of my tense ab muscles. He was willing me to relax and comforting my nerves with his gentle touch. He took my cock deeper and the warmth of his mouth was unlike anything I could've ever imagined in all my best jack off scenarios. I'd played this scene over in my mind many times. *I've got to look.* The pressure of his stroking and slobbering all over my dick was insane. My dick throbbed and pulsed, and I knew I'd be blasting off any second. I'd never experienced a blow job before, and I was having trouble not blasting my load.

I lifted my head off the tarp and opened my eyes. Looking down across my exposed body, I watched as he worked my shaft up and down with his slick hand and mouth. Caleb opened his own eyes, tilted his head up and caught my gaze. His eyes spoke volumes as to what he was feeling. He grinned at me like a kid that had found a new toy, apparently an edible one; he'd shed his goody two shoes image for me. He wanted me, all of me, in his mouth. I stretched my neck higher to get a better look at the fucking blow job I was experiencing for the first time, the visual even hotter. That's when I noticed he had his own dick out, and was stroking it hard, as he sucked me off. A massive grin busted across his face when he caught me staring at him, my mouth agape.

He slapped his dick harder. "Jesus fucking… shit…" I gasped. I could barely handle the vision before me. I grabbed his head and slammed my cock into his mouth, forcing him to drain my balls. My shy boyfriend had discovered a new talent and he was sharing it with me. This entire scene was crazy and hot. I knew there was no way in hell he'd ever given one before. "Jesus, Caleb! This feels… feels… fuuucckkk… I don't know how to describe it," I said, throwing an arm

above my head and tugging on my hair.

He removed my cock from his mouth. “You like it though, right?” He had a huge grin on his face. I didn’t bother answering verbally, instead, I grabbed the back of his head with my free hand and shoved his mouth back down onto my throbbing dick.

“Whatta you think?” I growled.

“Mmm hmm,” he mumbled with a mouth full of meat. He continued to slobber on my dick while I held his head, afraid he’d stop.

“I’m gonna blow.”

“Me too!” he mumbled again.

The sight of him jacking off and slobbering on my cock was all I could handle. *So, this was what it was going to be like?* My mind exploded as I felt the rush of him inhaling my cock. My dick flexed, swelling my plum head, I was close. “I’m… gonna… shoot, Caleb! Oh… fuck!” I felt the load churning in my nuts and up my shaft. Caleb pounded on his dick, sensing I was going to unload soon. I gripped his head with both my hands and lifted my ass off the tarp to get every single inch into his wet mouth. I had no idea what noises I’d made as I spilled into him. “Oh yeah! Fuuucckkk… yeah.” I was pumping his mouth as I came, his body quivered, and stiffened as his own load shot out of his dick and all over my leg. Both of us were breathing loudly and he leaned forward, collapsing on me.

We lay there panting and melting into each other’s sweat. I wrapped my arms around him. An entirely different boy was lying in my arms.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: JOEY

A group of players was circled around Dorall nearly twenty yards down from where I threw the last pass. I was sure he had caught my pass, so what was the hold up? We had Henderson High on the schedule for Saturday as our first District playoff game and I was on edge.

"What's the fucking hold up, Pete?" I yelled.

"Dorall is down, Crow, sit tight, bro!" he hollered back. I heard our Assistant Coach's whistle blow and his hand waved toward the bench to get the trainer over. "What the fuck?" I mumbled to no one. *We can't lose Dorall, for Christ's sake.* I made my way to the small group around the injured player, pushing guys out of my way to see what the fuss was.

"It hurts, Tommy," I heard Dorall say to the local doc and our team's volunteer physician. He was whimpering. Doc Hester had a family practice over on Miller Street and had held and examined my nuts for years during team physicals. We knew Doc well and trusted him with our health.

"Can you bend your knee, Kevin?" he asked Dorall.

"No! Its burning like hell, Doc."

Kevin Dorall, our star receiver, was in serious pain. What the fuck was I going to do without him? Doc had a grave look of concern and told the team managers to grab a gurney. He glanced at his watch. It was half past five. "He's going to the clinic," he stated, shooting a serious look at Coach and shook his head left to right. I turned my slack jawed gaze at Coach and waited for his response. He pulled his cap off and ran his hands through his hair. *We're fucked!*

The support staff got Dorall off the field and Coach gave a rousing speech about a team being a group of people, overcoming obstacles, *blah blah blah.* My mind was stuck on how the hell we were supposed to beat Henderson High without our star receiver. Coach made us keep going full out, jumping all over my ass about errors I was making with my reads. My confidence had been shit since the night at the barn practicing with Caleb, and now I was blowing my reads again. I focused harder, finishing the practice with few fuck ups. I skulked over to the bench where most of the team were commiserating about Dorall, when Coach came up behind me and tapped me on my pads.

"Meet me in my office."

Coach closed the door to his office as I entered. *This shit was getting serious.* He hardly ever shut his door from the locker room. I was sure of one thing though, he wanted to discuss something private with me. I barely had time to reach a chair. "We are fucked, Crow!" His fingers squeezed the bridge of his nose as he tried to pull his thoughts together. His determination of our chances hadn't been what I'd expected, and my face gave my shock away instantly. He held his hand up, apologizing for his language. "Sorry Joey. I shouldn't have said that."

Off came the hat and up went the hands to the hair. "What are we gonna do, Coach?" I felt a pit of despair about our playoffs.

"We're going to think, son, that's what we are going to do." He leaned back and grabbed his roster clipboard off the top of a file cabinet beside him and tossed it across his desk. "Pick one, find just one guy that can replace Dorall."

My eyes scanned up and down the roster, mentally checking off guys that I knew had no chance. "We could run," I half joked.

Coach laughed at the idea. "Against that front line? We've lost our deep ball threat, Crow. Dorall was our best weapon." He slammed his cap down on the desk and stared at me trying to will a gift from my brain. "Anything, Captain?"

"Well…" I began. And then I explained my idea.

"You sure? You're talking about your boyfriend, right?" he

asked.

My face caught fire hearing him say those words to me. *Fuck! This was wild. My head coach just called him my boyfriend.* "Yeah, Coach, Hollings is big, he's fast as shit too and he knows our playbook as good as I do. Every season, I learn the new playbook with him. He drills me on the play calls, runs the patterns with me, he knows it all. Hell, last week he was up my ass about blown reads. He knows this stuff, Coach; I'm not shitting you!"

Coach Roberts sat silent, mulling my pitch over in his mind. "Get Hollings over to Doc, get a signed parent form…"

I cut him off. "He's eighteen, Coach."

Caleb didn't need parental permission as far as the school was concerned. "Then get him over to Doc for the physical. If the boy you describe is as good as you say he is, we've got a shot."

"You can do it, Angel, trust me." I was pleading with Caleb in his driveway. I'd dropped by after practice to spill the beans to him about my plan.

"I've never been hit before, Joey, that's a whole different thing there." He stared absently at me. He lacked confidence and I knew I'd better amp up my skills as a motivator.

"Fuck that! I've seen you wrestle steers bigger'n you, dude, sure you can!" I cajoled. "There ain't one fucking high school kid that is going to track your speedy ass down, and I know you'll fuck 'em up if they try to tackle you."

"I just don't know about this."

"Come on, you're buff as shit… I got your back."

He was staring into his lap, and I knew he was trying to figure out if he could do this. "Come on stud, I need you. Are you going to let your boyfriend, the fucking Homecoming King, down?"

He laughed out loud at my lame joke. "You told Coach Roberts about this wild idea of yours?" *Yes! He's really giving this shit some thought.* He always examined everything three ways to Sunday before taking it on.

“Sure did! He even called you my boyfriend. Can you believe that? Even the teachers know.”

“I’m in.”

“You are? Really?” I was flabbergasted. I wasted no time, in case he reconsidered, and fished the play book out of my duffel bag, tossing it across the console to him.

“So you can brush up.”

“Maybe you should brush up, dude! Last time I ran patterns with the king, he wasn’t so accurate.”

“Did you seriously just call me dude? Who the hell are you?”

“I still need to run this by my parents, but all the work is done around here through winter, so…”

Practice was brutal. Caleb tripped over defenders and struggled with running the plays. Shit was vastly different when you had a real defense and twenty-two guys on the field at one time, but he kept at it. I knew he could focus, and he wasn’t a quitter. I glanced over at Coach several times to check his pulse. One blown route and a missed block had him concerned, but at least he was considering it.

A breakthrough came when we had two receivers wide out to my right side. The ball was not going to Caleb, but he knew the play well enough to foresee where it was headed. He took off like a missile and ran ahead of the intended receiver and landed a blow that the defensive back hadn’t expected. Caleb knocked him on his ass, so my receiver had a clear path to the end zone. I arced a perfect floater and the receiver ran in undefended.

“Holy Jesus! Mother of Mary,” Coach hollered. He was jumping up and down swatting his cap on his hips and laughing like a madman. I kept an eye on Larson, our best defender, to see what he might do after getting blown off his feet. Seth was one of the biggest dudes on the field and he’d never been lifted off his feet so easily. The team was cheering like mad, and Caleb trotted back up to the line of scrimmage looking sheepish as all fuck. Of course, Hastings gave him a deluxe high five and jumped into his arms. Seth Larson walked up to Caleb and removed his helmet. I was ready because I knew Caleb

wouldn't fight. He wasn't capable of that kind of hostility. Coach put his whistle to his lips in anticipation of a problem. Seth got in Caleb's face and then he stuck his hand out and shook his hand while giving him a tap on his helmet.

Coach blew his whistle and hollered. "Good job, Hollings! Larson, keep your eyes open, son." *This might actually fucking work*.

Halfway through the week, and all the school could talk about was the fact that Caleb Hollings, shy and humble church boy, boyfriend of the star quarterback, was a last-minute sub for the playoff bound football team. He had become a minor celebrity, embarrassed by the notoriety. He'd just recovered from his outburst at church.

"I don't know how you take the pressure every week, Joey."

We were walking to the only class we had together, English Lit. "You'll get used to it."

"I'm nowhere as good as Kevin and these people think I've got it. I don't know if I can do it." He looked frightened, his handsome face pleading with me to pull the plug on the whole idea.

The bell rang so we hustled to make our way into the classroom. At first glance, the classroom looked empty. But, it wasn't, the entire class was standing off to one side, against the wall, and they began to stomp their feet and clap when we made our way in. Caleb hesitated and half-hid behind me, using me as a shield. I knew he was embarrassed because he hated being singled out or made to be the center of anything. I'd become somewhat accustomed to this as the leader of the most popular sport at school.

I moved to the side and put a hand behind his back, forcing him into the classroom. "Hollings! Hollings! Hollings!"

I reached down and grabbed his arm, raising it high with mine and let the cheer envelop us both. *This is how you handle this shit*.

There were a thousand things I loved about him, but I think that was the main one. He was shy and had no awareness of his effect on those around him. Nearly eleven years of him wanting to remain in my shadow, and there he was, experiencing what he deserved, experiencing what I had always known—everyone liked Caleb Hollings. He turned his head toward me with the biggest shit-eating

grin I think I had witnessed on his face.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: Caleb

You got this Caleb, just calm down… deep breaths. My stomach churned with fear and anxiety. I was sitting in the middle of the gymnasium with the team. I'd witnessed this setup dozens of times, but only from the bleachers… this was entirely different. The crowd in the bleachers looked enormous. My foot shook with nervousness as I waited for Joey to make his entrance. I kept glancing anxiously at the crowd. All eyes were bearing down on me, like they knew I was a fraud. Two weeks ago, I was over there with the mortals where I belonged.

Per school tradition, the starting quarterback and the captain, usually the same person, came out last as a sign of respect to their individual efforts and hard work.

"Alright Madras High, I want all of you to give a rousing welcome to your Captain and starting quarterback, Joey Crow, and our backup senior quarterback, Jaylen Ross!" Coach yelled into the microphone.

The student body stood and roared as the two quarterbacks walked in, hands in the air, fists pumping. Joey was jumping up and down and encouraging Jaylen to join him in getting the crowd worked up. He pulled Jaylen to his side and put an arm around his shoulders, pointing at him, trying to get the crowd to rally around his backup. The student body was used to yelling, '*Crow! Crow! Crow!'* But Joey wanted them to yell for Jaylen, in a typically selfless demonstration of why he was beloved at our high school. The students loved Joey too much, so they came up with their own cheer '*Joey! Jaylen! Joey! Jaylen!'*

Joey pushed an elbow into Jaylen's side as a gesture of acknowledgment and teasing, and you could see the respect that Jaylen had for him in that moment. The team ate it up and erupted from their chairs, rushing for their heroes, and danced around the two quarterbacks in a circle. I was stunned, yet so happy to be a part of

the adulation. It took me a moment to give myself permission to join in and act without concern of how I'd looked. I'd never felt so free and happy about anything in my high school life.

After the assembly, the team had a walk-through to put the final touches on the coaching staff's plan for Saturday night. This was the final practice before our first playoff game, and I was focused on what I needed to do to improve and help us win. The coaches had designed a surprise element for Henderson High, and we were walking through the play and making sure everyone knew where to be to make it work. Joey was his usual encouraging self and like he always did for the entire team, he pushed me hard and never forgot to praise good work.

Joey used his tongue to push his mouthguard out and into his hand. "You're really getting the offense, Angel. I'm not blowing smoke either, you really are," he said, smacking my helmet. "So, listen, I'm gonna call Colt 22 on the next play, but I want you to run balls to the wall to the end zone. I want to see if we can get the longball going, you got it?"

I nodded in acknowledgment. "You want me to stay along the sidelines?"

"No, not at first; eventually you will, but don't let Pete think you're going any further than ten yards. I want you to cross the center hash, and if he bites, break right and haul ass as fast as you can."

None of us had pads on, so all plays were about avoiding being touched and making your cuts if you were carrying the ball or catching the passes. "12, 29, Colt 22, hut, hut!" Joey bellowed, and we all shot off the line of scrimmage. Pete Hastings was defending me, so I sprinted out quick to the center hashmark about 10 yards out from Joey. I looked back at him as I would anticipating the pass. Pete bit on the fake, so I bolted past him at a full stride and headed for the ten-yard line. Joey had the ball in the air before I had covered the distance, so I put myself into overdrive and churned my legs as fast as I could. At about the 10-yard line, I turned my head back over my shoulder just in time to see Joey's pass coming in high. I lunged forward in the air, leaving my feet, and with my arms outstretched, watched as the ball dropped directly in my hands. Pulling it into my chest, I somersaulted into the end zone.

The entire sideline had been watching the long bomb and stood frozen, waiting to see if I was going to come out of my roll with the

ball in my hands. There wasn't a defender within twenty yards of me. *I held on. I freaking held on!* I stood in the endzone with the ball above my head and watched my team go crazy. Joey sprinted down the field to me and jumped into my arms. "You fucking, stud. Holy shit, dude. I fucking knew you could do it!" We jogged back up the field and into the arms of my crazed teammates.

Coach blew his whistle. "Showers, guys. You got thirty minutes. Everyone at the bus in thirty."

We fell into littles groups, high fiving and talking smack as we made our way to the locker room. The coaching staff, with the administration's permission, were taking the team out for a pregame dinner at Madras's finest diner out at the airport.

"Too bad we'll be on the bus; I could go for some skin to skin with my stud," Joey whispered as we approached the locker room door.

"Dinner isn't all night, is it?" I nudged his shoulder.

"Damn boy, I like you lately!"

It was weird at first to be showering with a bunch of guys I'd gone to school with for years. "Just keep it casual when you're bullshitting and yakking with everyone, and try to keep your eyes off their junk. It's hard to do at first, but you'll figure it out," Joey had said.

I'd never been naked in front of anyone besides Joey, so I was embarrassed by the reality. There was a part of me that got excited at the prospect of seeing some of the guys I knew naked. I'd always been curious about how I measured up and had never asked Joey about it. When I'd wondered about the locker room showers before, it was because I was aware that Joey had showered hundreds of times with these guys, and it made me jealous.

"Keep your eyes to yourself, Ross!" I overheard Joey scolding Jaylen.

It wasn't my imagination after all, Jaylen had been checking me out the past week, a lot. I'd felt his wandering eyes from across the large shower area, checking me out when I wasn't looking, and when I finally caught his gaze, he raised a suggestive eyebrow and smirked.

He wasn't ashamed I'd caught him; he was enjoying himself. He lowered his eyes and stared directly at my privates, idly taking me all in. A smirk spread across his face and his head moved up and down exaggeratingly in a gesture of approval. How had Joey never figured this guy to be like us. *What a perv.*

Jaylen's aggression had not escaped Joey. He left his shower circle and stepped directly in front of Jaylen, cutting off his view, and getting in his face. "That's enough Ross, that one belongs to me," he growled.

"Sure, Crow. Can't a guy show his appreciation?"

Judging by Joey's face after that smart assed comment, he'd heard enough. "Not when the appreciation is focused on my guy, he can't. So, fuck off and keep your eyes to yourself." Joey placed a finger on his chest and gave it a thump as a warning. The détente between the two quarterbacks had ended.

Joey moved over to my shower circle after a teammate had finished his shower in an obvious show of protection. I didn't mind the way he'd made it clear to the team that I was his boyfriend and off limits, but he looked angry and that didn't sit well with me. The entire incident had seriously irritated him.

I was standing alongside him at our lockers. I'd never seen this side of Joey before. "I don't want that fucker near you, Caleb."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't trust him, and I don't want you near him." Joey threw his towel into his duffel bag, and sat on the bench, still letting the incident bother him.

"Now hang on a second. You don't trust Jaylen, I get that, but you trust me, right?" I didn't mind his protective nature, in fact, I depended on it, but this was different. "Well, do you, or don't you?"

He was sitting with his elbows on his knees, hands supporting a hanging head. "Yeah, I guess. I just don't like the way he's been acting since Homecoming," he mumbled, fumbling with my shoes, sitting next to him on the old wooden bench.

"What happened at Homecoming?"

“He basically told me that if I wasn’t with you, he’d be. I knew better than to trust that weasel.” He handed me my shoes while I pulled my socks on, waiting for me to finish dressing.

“You don’t have to trust him. You have to trust me.” Jaylen was in the corner making fart noises with his armpit and glaring across the room at me. Joey looked up in time to see him lick his lips while staring at me.

“OK, that’s fucking it.” He stood up and started to head across the locker room, but I grabbed his arm and yanked him back forcefully. He looked down at my hand on his jacket sleeve with fire in his eyes.

“Calm down. Ross isn’t worth you getting suspended again, especially right before the game tomorrow. Come on, let it go. You know him, he’s just trying to piss you off.” Joey lifted his eyebrow after hearing me use the word *piss*. “Truth of the matter, you don’t have to trust Jaylen.” I still had his arm in my grasp and looked directly into his eyes. “You will trust me though, and that’s what matters.” I slammed my locker shut with a hard slam, grabbed my duffel bag and headed for the door, leaving Joey staring at my back. *God! That felt good and I wasn’t sure why.*

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE: Joey

I slammed my locker shut and stood there confused, dick in the dirt. I wanted to go after Caleb when he walked off, without so much as a goodbye, but I was stunned. *Why was he acting like this?* Lately, he'd been more confident and able to make his way with ease. People were wanting his attention and time, taking it away from me. It wasn't that I resented the change, I liked it, but I was afraid of losing him all of a sudden. Ross was also a jock; maybe Caleb could see himself with someone else now. I sat back down, pissed at Ross, hurt by Caleb, but mostly angry at myself.

Coach flicked the lights off and yelled to me to get my ass in gear. I got to the bus to see Pete sitting next to Caleb. I sat up front. Pete saw me board and when he caught my eye, he raised an eye to ask *is this ok?* I nodded. It bothered me to no end to see Caleb ten rows back and not by my side. *What the fuck was wrong with me?* I leaned my head against the bus window. The freezing temp had turned the breath of forty teenaged boys into condensation on all the windows. One of the freshmen had drawn a dick on his window and was quite proud of it.

"Fag!" Ross taunted from two rows back. *Seriously Ross? You just said that?* Whoever Ross was into that week, guys or girls, he was still a douche.

The bus ride over was loud and crude, pretty much what you'd expect from a bunch of dudes. Tough guys hurling insults, chatter about pussy none of them would ever get, and the same boring stories of who they planned on creaming in their next game.

I recognized Coach Robert's car when we pulled into the parking lot of The Runway Café. He had driven separately with the other coaches. I remained in my seat as the bus unloaded. I was far too occupied in my head, miles away as I stared out at the runway. Seven or eight small planes were strapped to the ground due to the high winds that blew across the plateau at this elevation. Two cars

that I knew belonged to students were parked along the runway fence. Jason Parker was obviously still trying to get Marie Gaetz to give it up. Like the bus, his car's windows were steamed too. Main difference was it only had two occupants. Marie could do worse though; Jason's folks were loaded. They owned the largest ranch in these parts and all the Parker boys were involved. Jason was the only one at school, his final year, and then we'd lose him, and maybe Marie too to the confines of the ranch.

"You coming?" I recognized Caleb's soft voice over my shoulder. He was in the row behind me.

I stared straight ahead as the bus driver unpacked a brown paper bag and rifled through looking for a snack. "I'm sorry. I feel like shit taking my jealousy out on you." Caleb was quiet. "I spent the whole week watching the team bond with you and I got jealous. I suppose having you in my world got confusing."

"That was your idea, not mine."

"I know… but…" I was at a loss for words.

I felt Caleb place his hands on the top of my seat as he leaned forward. "You honestly, for one second, think I'd ever consider anyone but you?" He'd put his hands around the back of my neck, gently massaging it. My heart swelled. This was exactly what I'd needed to hear. "Remember when I felt this way and you assured me that you could never do better than me, and would never make that kind of mistake?"

"Yeah, I remember," I mumbled, loving the feel of his hands on my neck.

"Can you at least understand that I feel the exact same way about you?" He spoke in a calm reassuring tone. "Who's better than Crow?"

I chuckled. "No one."

"I need you to understand one thing though, Joey. You can trust me, and you don't have to feel threatened by Jaylen, or any other person, ever! I can handle myself," he said. My shy sweet farm boy was growing up and was finding his way without my protection. My heart wondered if I'd be ready for that man. I rested my head back

and turned my face to the side, and with a knowing smile, said, “I know you can, Angel.”

CHAPTER FORTY: Joey

Madras High ended up winning our first playoff game. Caleb even scored a touchdown on the trick play the coaches designed. The irony of the play was that I'd thrown a pass to my right, behind the line of scrimmage, where a waiting Jaylen Ross stood, thus making him the quarterback for the rest of that play. Ross had come in disguised as a receiver, and now had the short pass I'd thrown to him. He spotted Caleb running fast downfield and let loose a perfect spiral pass. Caleb waltzed into the end zone. I didn't like it much when they reconnected at mid-field and Ross leaped into his arms for the celebration. Ross wrapped his legs around Caleb like I had before our rendezvous in the barn, and the two of them jumped around hugging each other tightly. My heart hurt and I wanted to kill someone. It's you he loves Crow, just hang on to that thought and gut it out.

Unfortunately, we had a huge step up in competition after the first victory and got our lunch handed to us. In the second playoff game, our team held up strong for the first half but couldn't stop the run in the second half. It prevented me from orchestrating any kind of offense to score enough points for us to be competitive. That's what happens when you play a great defense. I played well, as did Caleb, but we just didn't have the level of excellence that they showed. My high school football career was over. I didn't want to play Community College ball, so my future football career ended as well. I wasn't a prototypical college quarterback and had no Division I or II recruiters looking at me. Caleb and I were both Honor Roll though, and knew we were headed to one of the four-year colleges that we'd applied to. We hadn't decided yet whether to stay in the state or accept offers we both had for out of state schools. All we'd decided so far was that we were going to be together every step of the way.

With football season over and the holidays around the corner, I'd made plans for a fun weekend. The grands owned a small cabin on reservation land that we'd used when we wanted to get away and enjoy the incredible beauty of the land. Caleb and I had stayed there several times over the years, hunting and fishing mostly.

Being a tribal member allowed me access to the reservation land anytime I wanted to get out into the wild woods. The cabin was remote with no electricity or running water. The interior was old and rustic and called for camping rather than a luxurious stay. The best thing about it was a natural hot spring, easily accessed from the cabin, not more than fifty yards away.

Caleb told his folks that we were heading up there to hunt pheasants. We were both equipped to handle shotguns having spent days target shooting and hunting together. We'd been around firearms our entire lives like most folk that lived in our community. I had another talent that Caleb was yet to master—bow and arrow. About a year of studying and practice with my dad before he disappeared, and then with grandpa, had made me damn good at it. Grandpa and I had often hunted deer and elk by bow instead of guns. Our family preferred the old ways and tried hard to keep the ways of our people alive. I was packing both my bow and my shotgun, but I wondered if we'd even be hunting…

I zipped my duffel bag and headed to the kitchen when Caleb's SUV pulled up to the house. We'd need to grab some stuff out of the barn where my grands stored extra firewood and camping tools that we'd need for the weekend. He was already in the kitchen, jacket off, wearing camo jeans and a tight green tee shirt. He looked so fucking hot sitting there, biceps bulging out of his short sleeves. I knew gram had invited him—her way to get a lad to have a bite of her latest baked goods.

"I was just getting Caleb a big slice of pound cake, Joey. How about you, love?" Caleb grinned, cake sticking to his lips. He gave me the *just trying to be polite to your gramma* shoulder shrug.

"I'm good gram, we gotta hit the trail."

"Your loss. I'll just pack some for you boys." She glanced at me and then over to Caleb. "Don't the two of you look like the handsomest outdoorsman in Oregon. Now listen up, I made a bunch of food for your weekend. Some of the cold stuff is out on the porch in an ice chest. You can keep it in there and leave it outside the cabin where its cold, it'll keep fine." She looked at me. "Just keep it up off the ground so no bear comes a-calling." The hills north of town, and the reservation, had a large population of bear. We were in the foothills of Mt. Hood after all.

“Gram, it’s dead of winter, they’ll be snoozing.”

“Yeah? Tell your grandpa that. Don’t you remember what happened three years ago?” Grandpa and I had discovered a bear who had decided to spend the winter in our cabin. We’d walked in unannounced and discovered a grumpy non-rent paying tenant. I’d never seen my grandfather move that quickly.

“I’ll blast his son-of-a-bitchin’ ass off,” I said, using my fingers as a fake gun and raising it at Caleb. “Boom,” I yelled. Gram gave me a stern look, so I ran over and pulled her lovingly into my arms. “Come on, gram, you know I’m teasing.” She swatted her hands at me. “Spill it lady, what kind of goodies did you pack for your boys? Some of your famous tuna salad sandwiches? You know Caleb loves those.” I squeezed her tightly and snuggled her neck.

I kept fussing with her, I knew she loved the teasing. “Well of course I did, and make sure you boys make your food stretch. Don’t be eating it all the first night. You two best remember that you have two full days.” She swatted at me again with her apron strings. “Forget it, who am I kidding.” She threw her hands up in exasperation. “Just be careful, ok?”

“My mother packed some fried chicken and coleslaw so we should have plenty of food, Mrs. Crow,” Caleb chimed in.

“Son, will you just call me gram like Joey does? You’re family around here.”

He grinned, looking surprised and happy at the same time. “Yes ma’am… I mean yes, gram, I’d like that.” He looked at me with pride. “Thank you, Mrs. Crow, for the cake and everything else. Shucks, ma’am, I did it again.”

She looked from me to Caleb and then back again. “This young man is a keeper, Joey. Treat him right or maybe I’ll snatch him up for myself. Now get outta my kitchen. I love you both, be safe.” She picked up Caleb’s dirty plate and headed for the sink.

Caleb helped me lug my stuff out to the Jeep cramming it all in the back seat, leaving the cargo area for the camping supplies. We headed over to the barn and grabbed the stove, sleeping bags, and a few other tools. I found the hidden key for the gun cabinet and picked

out my shotgun from grandpa's collection. The bow and arrows hung over the cabinet. I pointed at the blue tarp, still covering the feed hay.

"We need that?" I asked, my voice low and eyes twinkling suggestively.

Caleb held up our sleeping bags. "Nope! We got these and they have zippers." He grinned his sexy grin.

"Promise?"

"Oh yeah, definitely, probably more than once. If you liked the blue tarp experience, you're gonna love my sleeping bag tricks!" He puffed his chest out for effect. *This was going to be a bomb weekend.*

"We need to stop at Walmart to grab some ammo," I told Caleb.

"Cool, let's grab some more snacks too. I plan on pigging out this weekend," he said, ignoring the laundry list of goodies gram had packed.

After collecting our ammo and an insane number of additional snacks at the store, we needed to fill up the Jeep. We stopped by the gas station, which happened to have the cheapest gas in town, making it our favorite. My buddy Chad Norwood was tending to the pumps when we pulled in. He was chatting with a handsome guy, standing next to a flashy car.

"Check out the fucking car, Angel. Isn't that one of those BMWs you love so much?" He steered us right behind the expensive looking car. He turned the ignition off and sat staring out the front window, reluctant to get out and speak with Chad about gas.

"That's an Alexander talking to Chad," he whispered.

"And?"

"Alexander Development. Ring a bell?"

"You know that guy? How'd you meet him?" I asked, keeping the jealousy at bay.

"His name is Landon. He's the man that helped me when I

crashed my bike. His dad is Landon Alexander Senior, the owner of the company trying to buy our farms."

And then it dawned on me. "Well, fuck me sideways, perhaps I need to introduce myself." I reached for the door handle.

He shot me a fearful *please behave* look, but I slid out of the passenger seat and slammed the door shut, maybe a bit too strong, causing the guy to turn and see me heading in his direction. I recognized him as the flashy dude at the marina who had eye banged me so many times when I was filling up his boat, always giving me a fat tip afterwards. He smiled at me, no recognition registering on his face, and turned to Caleb who was still sitting in the Jeep. His smile got wider after spotting him, and he headed over to his window, motioning him to roll it down.

I walked back over to the Jeep to hear what they were talking about. He stared at me as I approached.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey!" I responded.

He returned his focus to Caleb. "Your buddy?" he asked.

"His boyfriend, actually," I said. He turned back to me, tilting his head down and then slowly moved his way back up, studying me.

"What's got you confused, too many clothes on for ya?" I said in a surly tone.

He looked stunned for a moment and then a sneer of recognition appeared on his face. "Marina boy… it is you."

"Don't refer to me as boy and I won't refer to you as asshole, deal?"

Caleb's eyes widened as he watched our standoff. I knew he was shocked by my tone and body language. Landon placed his hand on the edge of Caleb's door near the open window. I took the move as a sign of possession or a threat. "Do me a favor and back the fuck away from my boyfriend," I said, my growl daring him to fuck with me.

He looked dumbfounded by my abrupt behavior. "Do I know

you? You know me? What the fuck kid?"

"Ask your slimy father, maybe he can enlighten you about me and my family." I snarled through gritted teeth. "In fact, do me a fucking favor, will ya? Tell him you met Joseph Crow… the Third. Give him a message from me, and what's left of my family."

I was seething and knew I'd better relax before I did something stupid. Caleb was staring at me like I was possessed and warranted an exorcism. The Alexander backed away from the Jeep, shaking his head in disbelief. He turned and started walking back to his car. He stopped midway and retreated, glancing first at Caleb and then back to me. "And your message?"

I took three steps toward him. "You can tell him that I know, and it might not be today, maybe not even tomorrow, but soon, he'll get what he deserves. I'll see to that."

From the look on pretty boy's face, he wasn't surprised, wasn't even shocked. In fact, he seemed to know what I was talking about. "Ok, I'll let him know." And with that, he turned back to Chad, handing him a black credit card to pay for the gas.

I returned to the Jeep and waited by the gas pump for Chad to finish up. I stared as Landon left.

"You know that dude?" Chad asked as he reached for the Jeep's gas inlet.

"Barely."

"You seem pissed, Crow, you ok, bro?"

I shuffled my feet and checked on Caleb. He was quiet and had a distant look on his face. "Yeah, I'm cool, bro. Just some marina beef from last summer. Guy's a dick in my book."

"I'm meeting him after my shift, I'm going to let him smoke me out." He confirmed that Caleb wasn't paying attention and whispered, "I was laughing with him back there because he offered me a hundred bucks to let him suck my dick."

"You fucking serious right now?"

“I’m gonna let him, I need the cash. Gay for pay, you know what they say and why not, right? Free head and weed, baby!” He replaced the cap and the pump handle and put his hand out. “Thirty-five bucks.”

I handed him two twenties. “Keep the change.” He stared at the cash in his hand, surprised by the five-dollar tip.

“What this? You wanna blow me too?” he snorted, making both of us laugh.

“You seriously gonna let him suck your dick, Norwood?”

“Why not dude, I’ll be high as fuck and it feels good so, yeah, I guess I am.” He winked at me and gave me a fist bump.

I jumped back in the Jeep, and we headed north to Warm Springs Reservation. We had about thirty miles of highway ahead of us before we headed up into the hills, crossing cattle gates and dirt roads. Our goal was to get to the cabin before dark. There were no streetlights, and it was pitch-black in the hills, with wide swaths of nothingness—Just empty fields, barren and covered in snow.

Caleb was quiet.

“You ok?” I asked.

“Yeah, I guess.” He stared straight ahead at the passing pavement.

“No, you ain’t,” I said, but decided to let it sit for a while.

We passed the airport, the road cutting through the farmland, the river coming into view. Then began a long declining hill of asphalt before we entered reservation land. I’d reclined my seat, giving him time to come around and popped a can of Coke, enjoying watching my boyfriend drive.

“You’d let me know me if you’re mad at me?”

“I’m not mad, Joey. You just… seemed so angry at Landon and you were so mean to him. I guess I’m kind of shocked by how you acted back there.”

I paused for a second, letting the accusation sit there for a moment. “So, you think I should have been more polite to the asshole whose father probably murdered my folks? Is that what you think I should’ve done?” I was angry now. “I’m sorry if I embarrassed you, that wasn’t my plan.” I turned away from him, feeling hurt, and stared at the frozen nothingness, until I felt his hand on my arm.

He looked concerned. “You think the Alexanders did it?”

“Yeah, I do. Nobody but them had motive. Plus, I haven’t told you this, but the Sherriff called grandpa last Wednesday to let him know the investigation has heated up. Grandpa always had his suspicions, now we need the evidence. Apparently, some new shit has come to light, so we’ll see, I guess.” I sat back and closed my eyes, trying to regain my calm.

“That’s good news, I guess. Maybe not for the Alexanders though,” he said.

“Uh… one more thing Joey.” I opened my left eye slightly, and tilted my head toward him, curious. “I… uh… overheard you and Chad while you two were pumping the gas,” he admitted sheepishly.

My anger dissipated at the sudden change in topic. “Yeah, what part?” I asked, certainly not expecting to hear what came out of his mouth next.

“He offered to suck my dick too… last summer.” He turned his eyes back to the road, afraid to witness my reaction. I knew he was waiting for me to blow my top, lose my shit, or all the above.

But I’d regained my calm, a tenuous calm, but still. I remembered I was headed for a weekend with my man, so I just drew in a deep breath. “Can’t blame him really. Still wanna kill him but can’t say I blame him.” I paused for dramatic effect and then slowly turned to my beautiful boyfriend. “And… just so we’re clear about these matters, so do I!” I smiled at him, indicating we shouldn’t let that asshole ruin our trip.

“Well, we got all weekend, Crow!” he shot back, and we both started laughing uncontrollably. The stud was becoming a smart ass too. *What’s your next surprise?*

Caleb leaned back in his seat, one hand on the wheel, easily

navigating the road. I couldn't keep my eyes off him.

"What?" he'd caught me staring at him.

"You're so hot, that's what! Two whole nights with you? Naked in sleeping bags? Holy Jesus!" I feigned an out of body experience.

"I ain't zipping my bag with yours," he said.

I grabbed my dick over my pants. "You want some of this and you will, boy."

We'd never been this aggressive with each other, but we both knew we weren't kids anymore. I'd planned to move things even further along this weekend, and I'd thought it would have to be me to do it. But then again, who knew anymore. He'd been full of surprises lately.

Almost as if he read my mind, he said, "I want to try some new stuff this weekend. I mean like serious boyfriend things. Do you think we could…?" He was blushing.

"You mean like that gay shit and all?"

"Joey, I'm serious about this, stop teasing me. I want to be with you, like in the biblical sense."

"Biblical sense?" I snorted, Coke blasting out of my nose. "That just made my dick limp!" I laughed and reached over to put my hand directly on his cock. "Do you mean, like this?" I expected him to jump. Instead, he forced my hand down on his crotch harder.

"Exactly like that." He moaned. My dick sprang to life again.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE: Caleb

On a clear day you could see the Cascade mountains and their sloping foothills covered in snow. Winter in Central Oregon could be brutal, but it was also beautiful. The neighboring mountain tops were dipped in snow, looking like perfect vanilla ice cream cones. Once we'd officially entered the tribal land, it was only a mile and a half to the dirt road that led to the cabin.

"Hey, sleepy head, we got everything before I head up?" I asked. Driving down to a local gas station for basic food items was not in my weekend itinerary. I had more important activities planned.

"We're good. How much you plan on eating?" he asked.

"A lot," I looked down at his lap suggestively.

The road was covered in snow and deep tire tracks, so once you got in a muddy rut, you pushed on the gas pedal, hung on and followed the grooves. Joey's grandparent's cabin was the first one you encountered two miles in and lucky for us, someone else had been staying in a cabin close by, so the road was passable.

"Hey, check out the grouse," Joey said, as he lazily pointed to the right side of the road. "Shoulda loaded my shotgun and had it up here with me." He was an excellent shot, so I had zero doubt he would've snagged a couple, possibly with one shotgun blast. "I promised gram I'd try to get some pheasant. But she might have to settle with grouse."

He was leaning forward, scanning the snowy fields as we bounced our way up the hill. "Probably a good thing you don't have a gun up here. These roads are gnarly, wouldn't want to get shot myself." I laughed.

"Now why would I shoot my favorite animal?" Joey winked at me.

“Is that me?” I asked.

“Damn right! And the animal you keep in those sexy camo jeans.”

I laughed out loud. “You’re weird, dude, but I love you.”

He was quiet, so I turned to my right to see if he’d heard me. “You always amaze me, Angel. How’d you know I needed to hear that at that exact moment?”

“Because… my hunky Native boy, I’m an expert on all things you.”

We pulled up to the cabin after two bumpy miles. I glanced at my wristwatch. It was three, on the nose. We had about another hour of daylight, so we quickly unloaded the gear and Joey started working on a fire in the big stone fireplace.

After the fire kicked in and the cabin got to a bearable temperature, we both started shedding clothes. I tossed my insulated jacket on top of his and we set our boots close to the fire, hoping they’d dry out overnight.

The Crow family cabin was a typical hunting cabin. Not big on amenities but big on charm for sure. There were a couple of bunk beds pushed against one wall with plastic covered bare mattresses waiting for a sleeping bag. The kitchen had a countertop with a cook stove on it and some small cabinets for limited dishes and a few old pots and pans. It had a sink, but no running water. A visible bucket sat under it to hold the water used to wash dishes or clean wildlife. A big old leather couch, and a possible one thousand-year-old chair, covered in some heavy gauze material, sat in the corner. The giant stone fireplace took up almost an entire wall. Beneath that, to the right, was a platform about a foot off the floor. This was where you could lay the spare mattress that was leaning against the bunks. Joey tossed it down and indicated that this was where he’d planned for us to sleep.

“Wanna go hop in the hot springs?” I asked.

“Yep, sounds great.” Gram had packed us an iron skillet full of beef stew. “Let me put the stew over the fire before we head out.”

He busied himself with a steel rack, getting it settled in the fireplace so the stew wouldn't collapse into the fire. "That smells killer." I was almost drooling.

"Hungry? Wanna eat?" Joey asked.

"Not yet, let's go to the springs first." I grabbed us a couple of cokes and a can of Pringles, our favorite snack.

The towels we'd packed were hanging by the door. We both stripped down to nothing and headed for the hot springs, grabbing the towels on the way out. It was only half past four, but the sun had disappeared behind the hills.

I watched Joey lustfully as he walked ahead of me on the narrow trail. I admired his lean back and V-shaped torso. His perfect light brown bubble butt was firm as he walked. Tall, smooth and lean with cascading black hair, he was a sight to see in the flesh.

"You checking my ass out again?"

A memory flooded my mind; he'd said the exact same thing last summer at the rock. A lot had transpired since then. I was a different person, and we were in a different place in our friendship. I was changing and knew *exactly* what we were to each other.

"Heck yeah, dude! Shut up and keep walking. The view just keeps getting better from back here."

I caught up and came up behind him for a bear hug. I pressed my slightly larger frame against his, pulling him back and into my body.

"Mmm… nice. So, you were staring at my ass," he murmured.

I moved my hands from around his waist and held his ass in my palms. He moaned and leaned his head back against my shoulder. I nestled my face into his neck and kissed him lightly.

"Who are you?" he asked dreamily, his breath forming clouds in the brisk air.

He squirmed out of my grip so he could turn around to face me and slid his arms around my waist. I could feel his fingers tracing the

upper edges of my butt, the sensitive space just below my lower back.

"You feel amazing," I whispered.

His hands slid to my butt cheeks, and he pulled me into him, groaning. "Fuuucckkk, you feel so good too."

We stood in the middle of the trail, naked, bodies touching, absorbing each other's heat. I moved my face from where it was snuggled against his neck and placed my lips directly on his. He was hungry and welcomed my tongue as I slid it across his lips and then darted my tongue in and out. I heard a low groan escape from some needy place in his body.

"Jesus, Angel, you weren't kidding," he said, taking a break from my mouth.

"I'm crazy about you Joey. I'm going to show you exactly what that means this weekend. It's still me though, so please don't freak out. I'm so tired of being Mr. Innocent, and I'm tired of being fearful of what the bible teaches. If this is wrong, then I don't want to be right."

"Who knew you had this in you? I'm diggin' the new you, so don't you worry. I know the real you, and I know that this Caleb is going to be perfect. I'm totally cool with being the guy whose bones you jump."

"Like this bone?" I growled in his ear and grabbed his penis and began rubbing it.

He moaned, as I stroked his swelling penis.

I let go and grabbed his hand to lead him the short ten yards to the hot springs. We stepped in, holding one another and gave ourselves a moment to deal with the temperature of the water. The spring was only two to three feet deep in the shallowest part of the pool, getting deeper and maxing out at about five feet on the edge nearest the trail. A nearly perfect heart shape, it was fed from an underground thermal, keeping the temperatures at a barely tolerable level. A dozen people could fit in it if everyone sat in a circle, like in a hot tub. The rocks that lined the pool and its edges were warm from the water. The idyllic setting was crowned with large Ponderosa Pines scattered around it, disappearing into the heavier woods.

We slowly sunk into the water, pausing to let our privates adjust to the temperature.

"Fuckin-A! My nuts are burning!" He gritted his teeth as he got used to the hot water.

We sat Indian style across from each other smiling and grinning like a couple of teenage fools. I laughed at the irony.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"I was thinking about the saying *sitting Indian style*."

"That's some racist bullshit there, son." He stuck his hand in the water and squirted a blast at my face. I knew Joey well enough to know that he was not sensitive about things like that unless he felt oppressed or insulted.

The moon had cast light on the water and we both sat enjoying the beauty and warmth. I leaned forward, placing a hand behind his head and pulled him forward so I could kiss him again. Our knees were touching, and I moved my hand along his thighs very slowly. I stopped at the top, rubbing circles, slow circle here, a squeeze of his thighs there. The old version of me would have stopped at that. Caressing him, I moved my fingers closer and closer to his privates.

"Dude, this is fucking hot." He leaned back against the edge of the natural pool, elbows resting on the rocks.

"You like that, huh? Does it feel good? Can I touch your thing?" I asked innocently.

He opened his eyes wide. "Seriously… my thing? Call it a dick will ya? You wanna act like a nasty little boy, then start talking like one."

"How does this feel? You like my hands on your nuts?"

"There ya go champ, you just said nuts… nice." His eyes rolled back in his head. "Jesus fucking Christ, Caleb. What the fuck?"

So much for playing shy. He may have protested my juvenile terms for his penis, but his actions spoke louder as he forced his body

down and into my hands. I rubbed his balls and brought my other hand through the water and grabbed his wet, swollen cock with my fist. I moved up and down while gently squeezing his sack. His dick was throbbing, the head swelling fast. Joey had a thick and long cock, at least eight or nine inches of smooth, silky skin.

"Keep that shit up and I am gonna cum, stud." He moaned, before quickly adding, "Don't stop though, ok?"

I slowed my pace a bit. "Angel, this is *soooo* amazing." He was still leaning back on his elbows, thrusting his hips forward, and had his head tilted back, squirming like he'd never experienced such pleasure.

"Sit up on the edge, Joey."

His eyes popped open, his face was a mixture of surprise and desire all in one.

"What?"

"I said, sit your ass up on that ledge. Leave your feet in the water. And if you refer to me as dude one more time, the show is over."

Joey looked frightened all sudden. Maybe confused was a better description. I tapped his knee and gestured my head toward the rocky edge, showing him where I wanted him to sit. His eyes widened, but he did what my eyes told him to do. He lifted himself out the water with his arms, legs still up to mid-calf in water. His large penis slanted to the right from its own weight. His eyes were wider still as he nervously watched me scoot ahead, while remaining seated in a cross-legged position. I placed my hands on his knees again and slowly moved them apart. His huge erection continued leaning to one side while his smooth, full balls hung between his legs.

"Now relax, stud. I want to see if practice makes perfect, and if history tells me anything, I think you're gonna like this again." His jaw dropped, and he stared anxiously at me, a nervous breath escaping his tightened lips, dissolving in the air.

Leaning over, I put my mouth on the top of his rock-hard erection and slowly brought it inside my mouth, inch by inch and held it in my mouth for a moment so he could feel my warmth. Joey

whimpered like a puppy as I came back up, nice and slow and licked the head, ever so gently. I raised my eyes, glancing up at him. As soon as I caught his eye, I made his boner disappear. His mind blown, he stared into my eyes. I'm no mind reader, but his face revealed everything I could've predicted. I knew he was wondering *where has this been all these years*?

I smacked my lips like I had just eaten something delicious, and asked, "How does that feel, stud?"

Without an answer, he placed his hand on the back of my head and pushed me back on his cock.

"Shut up and suck my dick!"

I realized that I liked that sort of talk. I was really getting off on his nasty verbal smack talk. *Two can play at that mister*. I moved my mouth up and down his thick tool. My hands were covered in spit, and I used them to smoothly stroke him. I recalled the barn and what had made him respond then. I kept slobbering and taking his dick as deep as I could.

He was lifting his hips off the ledge and holding my head in position to control my movement, burying his dick deeper into me. Joey moved his hands from my ears and to the back of my head, holding it tight, pushing and pulling, up and down, filling me with his swollen dick.

His grip tightened on my head, and I decided to test an idea out. I took one of my slobbered fingers and pressed it against his butthole and gently rubbed in a circle. He made a sound that was incomprehensible but sounded like pleasure to me. My mouth moved up and down his erection faster and I applied more pressure to his hole, keeping rhythm with his grinding ass. He laid fully back on the ground and placed one of his legs on my shoulder. His nuts and ass were fully exposed to me. I assumed the move meant *more please*. I continued to play with his butthole as he ground down on my finger. My finger slipped past his tightness, and he jumped out of surprise, but he kept moving on my finger. I was building my grip on his erection and the speed. Moans of pleasure escaped from him as I took control of his asshole.

"Uunngh, I'm gonna bust. Fuuucckkk… me, it's coming. I'm gonna shoot in your fucking mouth!" He moaned a low guttural moan,

tensing up and forcing his hips hard into my hungry mouth. He held my head in place as he pumped his load down my hungry throat. “Fuuucckkk!” he whimpered, moaning low and deep, from a point in his body I didn’t recognize.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO: JOEY

I've gazed at the sky hundreds of times. In fact, it's one of our favorite pastimes. We'd wait for shooting stars, the grantors of wishes, and seek our boyhood dreams. None of the skies had ever matched this one. I closed my eyes, floating dreamily, and feeling things I hadn't thought possible. My body was completely drained, begging me to lie there forever, full of love and discovery. Fully spent, I didn't want to come back to reality.

I slowly returned from my darkened sky exploration and sat up, astonished to find Caleb still at my knees, staring up at me. He licked his lips slowly and seductively, his grin widening like he had a secret. He spread his thumb and middle finger apart, placed them to the corners of his mouth and exaggeratingly dragged them back together under his lower lip.

"Did you swallow that?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, wasn't I supposed to?" His brows lift questioningly as he smirked at the same time.

There was a definite change in him, he was different, growing like a butterfly after its first flight, suddenly released from its cocoon. He was still the blonde hunk of a farm boy I'd known since we were both seven years old, *but shit! What the fuck was that voodoo shit he'd just pulled on me?* He sat there gazing at me like nothing had happened, smiling with a flushed angelic face. He'd never lost that face; it'd just forged into something even more breathtaking.

"You just sucked my dick… again." *That sounded odd, stating the obvious*. "You're like an expert. When… where… what was that, Angel?" I stuttered, trying to find the words or to form a coherent question. "How'd you do that? I mean, I know you obviously seem to know how, but how'd you learn?" I sounded stupid. I was confused, starry eyed as I sat there looking at the sweet innocent guy that loved me with all his might.

“Was it ok?” he asked shyly.

Maybe I should have properly thanked him the first time. “Was it ok?” I laughed. “Does a bear shit in the woods, dude? Come on, you ain’t serious. Does it feel good?” I snorted. “What do you fucking think?”

“Well, you seemed to enjoy it from my angle.”

He crossed his arms in front of his chest and sat there looking sexy as fuck. I gave up. Who gives a shit how he learned it, I’m the one reaping the rewards.

“You’re the world’s best boyfriend!” I laughed, reaching out to pull him into me. “That was the most amazing thing I’ve ever experienced. I mean it, un-fuckin real! Can we do that a lot more in the future?”

“We can do it as much as you want. Now… tonight… five minutes from now… anytime you’d like.”

“How ‘bout we relax in the water a bit more and then we’ll head back to the cabin. It’s your turn next, you stud!”

He seemed quite pleased with himself, sitting in front of me proudly, while I sat there with a raging boner that wouldn’t go away. I was blown away by him at that moment. It’s funny, I always figured it would be me that would have to make the first sexual move in our relationship. But then again, I’d also heard about these church types before. They weren’t always what you thought they were, and I’d certainly discovered that the man of my dreams was a bit of a devil. I intended to enjoy the fuck outta this burgeoning revelation.

We walked back up the trail with our arms around each other’s shoulders, leaning heavily into one another, enjoying the normalcy of just being us, a couple. I was still semi-erect, and he was solid as a rock. “Someone’s showing some chub,” I said, playfully grabbing at his cock.

He was grinning like he’d just gotten away with something. “That was hot, Joey. I want to do that more, especially since you liked it so much.”

“You’ve got my permission, have at it. But it’s my turn next, you’re gonna have to wait until I show you what I can do.” I snarled, trying to grab his dick as he held my hands at bay. He shoved me away, laughing, and took off running for the cabin, his muscular white ass glaring in the moonlight.

“Hey, I don’t know which moon’s bigger, yours or the one up in the sky.”

“Come find out,” he yelled, coming to a stop, bending over and slapping an ass cheek and then taking off again.

I took off after him, catching up before he made it to the cabin door. He was stronger, but I was much faster. We fell into the cabin, landing on the big bear rug that was in front of the bed. I grabbed him and pulled him on top of me, wrapping my legs around him and invited him to slide into my embrace.

“Someone’s got a boner, someone’s got a boner. Church boy has a boner.” I sing-song-ed, acting like a five-year-old.

He was quite a bit bigger than I was. I had him in height by an inch, but he had more mass and bigger muscles, at least 20 pounds heavier. He was lying on top of me, our cocks were pressed hard against each other. We’d been like this before, but I knew this was going to be different. After what he’d done at the springs, I owed him, and I was going to deliver. I moved my fingers through his blonde hair, mussing and tussling with it, wondering like I suppose many people do, what it’d be like being a sexy blonde. All the attention he received, never seeming to notice.

He buried his face in my neck. “The head was great, Angel. It felt sooooo… fucking hot.” I endeavored to make my voice suggestive as I teased him. “Did you like having my cock in your mouth?” Switching to a sexy whisper, I asked, “Did it taste good?” I’d decided to talk some real smack now, two could play his newfound game. I moved my hands to his lower back, reaching for and grabbing his ass cheeks, pulling him closer. His cock was hard as steel and pressed against my stomach. I’d never get enough of this feeling.

“Mmm… you feel good, Joey.” He nuzzled deeper into my neck, humming his satisfaction.

He grabbed my arms and held them to the floor over my head,

his strength apparent, but I didn't struggle. He seemed to be loving this *take control* trip he was on. "Oohhh, you like it rough, do ya?" I murmured in his ear.

"Mmm hmmm," he moaned. He had his mouth on my neck, nipping on it aggressively. I was pinned to the floor, completely helpless. If this had been anyone else, I'd have freaked the fuck out! I didn't do vulnerable all that well, but I felt an unexpected feeling, excited and nervous, awakening in me, especially at being held against my will.

Caleb was grunting and pushing me around the rug with his sheer strength. My arms still above my head and legs wrapped tightly around him, pulling him into me as if we would never be close enough. He slid his hand around my back as he pushed himself up and came to his knees with me in his powerful arms. Once there, he stood and lifted me off the rug with him. I kept my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck, and he carried me to the platform bed.

"Holy fuck, dude. I know you're strong, but shit, this is the second time you've picked me up like a sack of potatoes or something."

"Scared?" he asked, in a deep voice I'd never heard him use, startling me.

What the fuck?

"Should I be?" I asked nervously.

I felt an unusual fear rising in the back of my mind. On one hand it was exciting wondering what was going to happen, but on the other hand… *was I ready?* He was strong as an ox, and I'll admit, I thought I could be in trouble. The alarms were pounding in my mind, and I felt panicked for some odd reason, my eyes giving away my alarm.

"It's ok, Joey, I would *never* hurt you, baby."

It was definitely him, but still different somehow. His voice was deep, controlled and calm; determination was written on his face. His lips came down on mine, reassuring me, and he gently laid me on the bed.

"I know, but sometimes I'm just freaked by your strength. I forget about you and all the hay bale tossing you do all summer."

My comment didn't stop him from getting back to where he'd left off. He was back on me in a flash and had my arms pinned above my head again, only using one arm, while he grabbed my cock with the other.

"I like this," he said, my cock in his hand. "I mean, *I like it*… like, a lot." He grinned at me with a crazed look on his face.

In a flash he was sliding down my stomach with his tongue and had my cock back in his mouth. He was still positioned between my legs and had his knees pressed to keep my legs spread wide, as he swallowed my dick.

"Fuuucckkk!" I relaxed my arms, still above my head. "This was supposed to be your turn, stud," I said, pretending I didn't deserve or want BJ number two. *A total lie.*

He came off my cock and teasingly stuck a finger in his mouth, moved it slowly around his mouth, in and out, getting spit all over it. Alarm bells rang big time. I tensed up and immediately brought my hands down to my sides and my legs together, clamped to his waist.

"It's ok, Crow," he whispered. *Crow?* "Relax, lay back, stud. I'm not going to hurt you. We can go at your pace, ok?" He had a seriously maniacal look on his face. *Who are you? Did you just call me Crow?* It was odd, but hearing it also made my dick harder. I lay back, trying hard to relax. My churchgoing boyfriend had completely lost his shit, that was obvious. It was totally true; the innocent ones were wild when released from the bindings of fear and religion. He went back to town on my schlong, so I was back to a full hard-on in a flash. I allowed myself to melt into the mattress and enjoy his mouth. I brought my hands above my head again, exposing myself completely to him, and… that was when *everything* changed.

Caleb nudged my legs further apart and moved his free hand under my balls, gently holding them before moving a finger to my butthole again. "I don't know about this, dude," I whispered, lifting my head and warning him.

"Relax dude, you liked it at the springs, right? Just trust me. I'll stop when you ask me to stop." *Crow, and now dude? He was*

changing… right before my fucking eyes. Who is this confident sexual creature? Fuck it! Who cares?

I fell back and tried to relax, and he got back to slowly sucking my dick and massaging my balls. His finger slid down to my butthole again, coming to rest there. "Relax, it's all good. Just relax," he said, applying more pressure while swallowing my dick. He had quite a bit of warm spit working from my dick, and I felt it oozing down my taint. He gathered it on his finger and slowly applied pressure until he slipped into my entrance. He must have felt my body tense and clamp down on his finger because he held it there for a few moments before gently proceeding, still working my cock over. I felt myself relaxing, giving in to the invasion.

I closed my eyes and collapsed into the rush I was feeling. "Mmm… that feels so good." I was on fire again. *I want you to use the fuck out of me. Own my body.* Questions passed through my mind, but I relinquished the fear. I was horny as fuck. My dick was angry and hard as Caleb teased it up and then down, adding speed. I lifted my ass off the mattress, assuring him it felt good and letting myself accept this new desire. I rode his finger eagerly, unexpected pleasure driving me on.

"Your butt is so tight. How's it feeling, sexy? You like your man's finger in your hole?" *That's not the voice of a choir boy.* He was in firm control now; he had desires that needed to be filled. All I could do was moan and writhe on the bed as he drove me nuts.

"Put it in farm boy." *Where'd that come from? I heard me say it but… wait… what? Was I losing my mind?*

"You sure?"

I watched as he removed his finger and brought it back up to his mouth, spitting on the tip of his finger. He stared down at me, I was trembling with fear, and yet I felt overwhelming desire for him.

"Yes."

Something, someone, an imposter perhaps, had spoken the answer from my mouth. Caleb had my cock back in his mouth and was pushing against my butthole with his finger.

Knock, knock, anybody home? Can I do this?

I felt myself let go, relaxing as the waves of ecstasy swept me into their current. My body was going limp as he swallowed my cock and had his finger swirling near my hole again. I willed myself to relax and felt his finger break through the wall of fear. One, then two fingers, fully inside me. He paused until I relaxed. Once again moving his mouth over my dick, all the while stretching me and probing me.

"Yeesss… holy shit dude. What the fuck are you doing to me? Sooooo… good… so…" I was on fire, my head exploding, I wanted him to finger fuck me harder.

"Where's the Vaseline?" he asked.

We always kept Vaseline in the gun bags for lubing the gun parts and my bow. In the freezing temps it helped keep the guns primed for winter hunting.

"What the fuck for?" I asked, rearing my head up, fear in my voice.

"Trust me. Remember… at your pace, baby… at your pace. I want to do something special with you. You like it so far, right?"

"I… guess… yeah." I gulped, answering hesitantly. *What a fucking lie. I knew I wanted more. If he was asking permission to put his dick in my ass, I was saying, 'yes'.*

"In the gun bag, by the wall."

Caleb crawled across the bed and reached out for the gun bag. Rummaging through it, he pulled out the small bottle of Vaseline. I literally felt my asshole slam shut when I saw the small bottle.

"Now lay back stud and remember… relax, I'll take it slow," he instructed. *Who was this? Guiding me, instructing me, teaching… me? It looked like Caleb, sounded like Caleb, but I wasn't convinced he was truly in there.*

He was back on my cock in an instant, slowly building me back up. He knew how to get me to the edge each time, and then I heard the lid pop off the lube, his timing perfect. He seemed to know exactly what, where, and when I needed my strings pulled. He'd figured out I was his puppet and he seemed to be enjoying the fact. I felt myself

giving into his desires once again as he continued sucking on my dick. His lubed finger made its way to my hole, gently pushing its way in. Withdrawing after a moment, he added more lube and crept his way in again. He was going deeper and deeper into my hole and I was spreading my legs, wider and wider. Beyond aroused, I lifted my legs over his shoulders. I was exposed now. *You want it farm boy, well here it is, take it.*

He went back to sucking and had my ass spread to a full view as he worked his fingers. He was a technician, clinically taking control. I'd never felt such unreal pleasure before. The more control I gave over to him, the better it felt, the more excitement pumped through me. His face was clear, all hesitation gone, light perspiration gleaming in the fire light. At first it felt odd to have my legs in the air and my ass exposed to him. I felt vulnerable, questioning what was happening and how it had gotten to this, but he was laser focused on my asshole and I loved the attention.

"Relax ok, I'm sticking another finger in you."

Yes, coach. He was managing me, coaching me, instructing me on his way to gaining complete control of my willing body. He'd convinced me that I needed this, wanted this and he was going to lead the way. I'd go willingly, despite the questions and the fears that yelled from the back of my mind.

Two strong fingers explored me, and I felt an exhilarating tingle when he found something inside me. *Yes, rub that again, please, touch it again.* As he pressed against it, my dick swelled harder, and I felt waves of stimulation flowing over me. After what felt like a third finger, he brushed over the spot again. I had the urge to climax. *Stop! I'm not ready. This is heaven, the feeling… the feeling is unreal.* He looked up at me, studying my face to see what the verdict was. I knew I looked worried, thrilled, confused, and possibly… ready.

"Can I?" he whispered.

I silently moved my head up and down, still not sure what he was asking, eyes wide with a hunger I didn't understand. What was I going to do? I had a boner flopping between my legs and a hunk of beef worshipping my ass. I sure as hell wasn't saying no. I grabbed the back of my knees and pulled them up to my chest. *You wanna play? Well, have at it, choir boy.*

Caleb's eyes widened as he gazed thoughtfully over my exposed body. "That's hot, dude. You have an amazing butt, you know that?" His face was serious, eyes inspecting, roaming over my exposed ass. "I've been waiting to get my hands on your ass… fucking amazing." He nodded, agreeing with himself. He grabbed my tool and placed it back in his open mouth. *Did choir boy just say ass and fucking? Oh fuck, I'm in trouble for sure.*

When the fuck had Caleb Hollings discovered that he wanted to do all this crazy shit to me? Where's this boy been? He came up from my cock and kneeled in front of me with my legs on his shoulders, a wicked glint in his eyes. I watched silently as he reached for the jar of lube. My mouth was open, but I didn't speak, wondering *what the fuck is he doing?*

"Caleb? What are you up to? Are you really going to…?"

"What does it look like I'm up to, ya dumb jock?"

"I don't wanna be a buzzkill, stud, but you ain't putting that in my ass without a rubber."

His face flashed disappointed, collapsing when he realized he hadn't planned so perfectly after all. I gave it a second. If he was going to act like big man on campus, I was gonna fuck with him a bit. I laughed sweetly at him. "Cheer up, stud. It doesn't mean you can't." I reached for my jeans and the wallet inside the back pocket. "Here. I've had this for a year, at least. Just didn't figure you'd be the one wearing it though, tough guy." I grinned, and with him barely skipping a beat, the wicked look returned.

Gnashing the foiled edge with his teeth to release it, he slid the rubber over his swollen cock and removed the lid of the lube, scooping a generous amount out of the jar. Staring straight at me, he moved his hand down to his own hard dick and began to smear the lube all over it. His biceps bulging as he held his cock proudly, slathering himself, up and down, never moving his gaze from mine. He wanted me to see his fat dick before he performed his disappearing act. Holding it and daring me to look at it, his nostril flared in a nasty show of dominance. He took his sweet time greasing his cock, all the while quietly staring at me, questioning me from his sitting position just a few inches from my ass. His eyes went to my face and then swept down to the solid flesh in his hand. The very naughty farm boy was verifying… one last time.

He reached forward with his greasy hand, pushing mine away, and started stroking me. He palmed my head and then slid down the entire length, teasing me with every stroke. I closed my eyes and allowed myself to go back to the dream state, riding every new feeling my young sexless body had never felt before.

I'd never imagined him being this guy. He was sweet, shy and polite, having been like that our entire eleven years I'd known him, but someone flipped a switch today. Something about my shy boyfriend had changed in a big way. He was a man, and he was making it clear that he planned on using my very willing body for his pleasure.

The smooth motion of his hand jacking me off felt incredible and I began relaxing, my hips pushing down towards him. I felt his knees against my butt as he got closer to me. He spread his knees wider, causing mine to widen with him and then grabbed my hips to pull my ass right to his cock. He ground into me, moving up and down, fucking my balls with his greased-up cock. I glanced down at his perfect white cock sticking out below his washboard abs. He was a bigger guy than me physically, but not quite in that area. I had him by an inch or so, but still, he hung thick. I'd been around enough locker room cock to know big. It was big.

A light trail of blonde pubic hair above his cock went up to his navel, disappearing there. His abdomen, smooth and white, with barely a hint of tan line left over from the summer, led to a broad muscular chest. When he positioned my legs over his shoulders, his biceps bulged thick, clearly reminding me that he had control. I was doomed if he wanted to take me rough. *That was half the thrill though, wasn't it*? I was in a dreamy, horny state of mind as he kept stroking me. My eyes rolled back into my head, and I stretched my long arms above my head in complete surrender, as my farm boy explored.

I felt a larger pressure probing my hole. My asshole was trying to resist the intruder when his finger slid back in, covered with more grease, and I felt Caleb scoot a tiny bit forward. He had a hand on his hard dick, guiding it to my hole. He was definitely getting ready to fuck me. He maintained the stroking rhythm on my dick, keeping me on edge and continued to push.

"Relax. I'm gonna give you a little bit of my dick at a time, baby."

He was in control, I was his, so I decided to surrender completely. I'd pick up the shattered pieces of his image, later, if I really wanted to.

"Use me."

It was that strange voice again, had I thought those words, or had I really spoken them? How did we even get to the point that Caleb was going to fuck me? I'd never imagined it going this way, and yet I craved him. I needed my farm stud inside me right then.

His dick's head slipped in. *Ouch, fuck, that's not such a good feeling.* I tensed up and tried to resist, gently pushing back against his arms. He paused, holding himself motionless as he took his cues from me. His plum head was still in my ass, but it was not what I had expected. *I don't know if I can do this.* The fear voice was rising again. *Run, Joey, run. Do not let him put that any deeper.*

My dick was still hard though. I could do this. Even if it felt scary, it felt necessary, wanted, and desired. I'd panicked, but he was laser focused on my pleasure, once again. He twisted his lubed hand with every direction change, up and down, swirling my cock in his hand. I focused on how good my cock felt, and how I wanted to come again. I could feel it in my nuts, building, begging for release, so I decided to relax and give it another try.

"Easy, stud, ok?" I whispered.

I widened my legs as they rested on Caleb's shoulders. He stared intently into my eyes, his face full of want and desire… love. He seemed slightly possessed in the moment but sensing my unspoken desire for more of his cock in my ass, he switched gears and became gentler.

"Slow," I begged.

He appeared to be second guessing himself. "You sure?"

"Yes, keep jacking my cock though. It feels better if you keep jerking it."

He positioned my legs so that the back of my knees rested on the top his shoulders and he came forward, never releasing his grip on

my dick. He was over the top of me, I felt small and weak as I stared back at this amazing hunk of man/boy. I suddenly had a desire to feel every inch of his dick inside me. I relaxed and pushed back on his manhood. He leaned forward slowly, beginning to push my legs back to my chest as his shoulders came forward. His dick slid in slowly, inch by inch. I was taking him into my body. I felt the hardness stretching my hole as I was lost in the power he yielded over me.

I'd never figured that I could give myself over to someone like this and be so vulnerable. He was in control. *Yes, of course he was,* I unexpectedly realized; he'd been in control as soon as we'd arrived. But why did I like it so much? Why was I loving the role of being dominated? I was the stud jock at school, his protector. I made the decisions, and my word was the law in the locker room. Yet, here I was, ass in the air, getting my hole drilled by Caleb and loving it. I wanted it. I needed my sweet shy boyfriend to own my ass. I began to feel powerful in my role as his toy. It took a man to get fucked by a man, and I had no shame opening myself for Caleb. In fact, I felt fucking amazing!

He was increasing his speed, his brow sweating from the effort. "Take my ass, stud." I gritted my teeth. "Come on… drill me harder, it feels good, man." I spat through my teeth, loving it despite struggling with his dick in my ass.

He was sweating more as he worked me over. I grabbed his ass and pulled him into me deeper. That delivered the message loud and clear. I pushed his hand away and grabbed my dick, stroking harder.

"Come on farm boy, get it. Take it to your boyfriend," I hissed, teeth gritted. I was eager to be used.

The nastier my words, the wilder was Caleb's response. "Fuck, Crow! Your ass is fucking great. It feels so good on my dick. I'm gonna fuck you a thousand times in this lifetime. Maybe a thousand more after that." He was delirious, letting loose on the curse words too. I'd never heard him speak like this ever. Our eyes were locked on each other, the room lit with red and yellow, wavy flames of fire from the fireplace, giving the hot session a perfect setting.

"Come on stud, you're fucking the stud quarterback's ass now, man. Make me your boy." I wasn't sure where this crap I was spewing came from, but Caleb was losing his ever-loving shit over it. I felt nasty, animalistic and not embarrassed in the least.

“Keep yapping fucker, I like shit talk,” he growled. “Tell me how good my dick feels buried in your ass.”

My cock responded to his mouthy talk. This was unexpected to say the least, but he was rocking my world. “It’s so fucking deep, pound it boy, pound that hole.”

He rammed his cock deeper with every thrust. He lifted my legs off his shoulders, grabbed each ankle with a hand and had me spread out wide. He had complete control of my ass now as he held my legs high and spread them further apart as he stared down at his dick disappearing into my hole.

“Fuck yeah, Joey… dude... you should see my cock slamming into your hole.” His head whipped around, sweat flying, illuminated by the fire light. He’d pull it out, wait a second, then look me straight in the eye, warning me before plunging back in harder. “You like that dick, jock boy? Huh? You want some more of this?” He was out of his mind with lust. I stared at his naked body with worship and lust as he pounded my ass.

We were connected, two boys, now men, eleven years of love, coming together as one unit. My body ached with lust and my heart was full of love. This was our life, and this was our love. Passion and love, united at last.

My cock was red and throbbing as I fisted it while he plugged me harder. “Who’s the big stud now, fucker. Huh?” He lifted his brows, daring me to disagree with his dominance, grinning at me like a madman, furiously involved in his fantasy.

“You are farm boy. You’re the biggest, baddest farm fuck I’ll ever want fucked by.” I was also talking some serious smack now. I’d lost complete control and didn’t give a fuck! I’d been worked into a froth, our sweat splashed onto each other. Our bodies in rhythm with each other’s, moving, grinding in synchronized perfection.

“Fuck my hole, farm boy! Give me all you got, fucker!” I was panting and turning my head side to side as my ass was taking a beating.

Where the fuck had this Caleb been for the last couple years? We could’ve been fucking and sucking like bunnies by now. I felt like

I'd never really had a thrilling moment in my life, until now. Who knew that this connection, with the guy I'd loved my entire life, could feel like this? I was being used like a rag doll and it was fucking great!

He pulled his dick out and flipped me over. *Jesus, fuck, he's strong.* Tapping my hips, he said, "Get on all fours, Captain!"

I did as he said. He leaned forward and pushed my head flat onto the mattress and grabbed my hips, yanking me back to his cock. *What the fuck?* He was using my ass like he owned it. I felt him reenter from this angle, his swollen cock felt different, it was deeper and fuller. "You are so fucking my ass right now." I moaned with obvious pleasure, gripping the edge of the mattress, welcoming the thrusts. I could hardly imagine breathing ever again. *Why should I? I didn't need air. I needed this.*

"You like that, don't you? You love your big, strong farmer taking you hard from behind; you're such nasty little jock." He smacked my ass hard.

I turned my head and looked back at him. His eyes were focused on me, daring me to fuck with him, and I knew he was losing himself. A life of church and keeping himself in check had finally come undone. He was flinging the doors wide open and focusing all his determination on the man he loved, demonstrating that he'd been born again, alright.

"That all you got, boy?" I dared him to unleash his anger and pleasure on me.

He pulled his dick out, leaving only the swollen, angry, leaking, head in. "Oh… that's how you gonna be? You wanna talk some shit now, fucker!" he seethed, grinning like an awfully bad boy. I felt his arm push into my lower back to get my stretched asshole up and into his target range. I felt a surge of amazing pleasure as he slammed his dick back into me. He had my hips in his strong hands and was using my ass as he tore into me. I put my face down on the bed and kept my hungry ass up, inviting him in. I had no idea where this was coming from. *Why did this feel so fucking good?* I wanted his cock in my ass, *no*, I needed his cock in my ass. Caleb had me in his grip and was not letting up. I felt his dick's head slamming against something in my ass. *What the fuck was that? Again?* He kept slamming against the spot, hiding somewhere inside me. I felt pleasure I didn't know existed. I saw spots exploding in my eyes, lights flashing, "Fuuucckkk man!

Don't stop, farmer. Don't you dare, fucking stop." I growled like a cornered wolf, and turned to look back at my guy, drilling my ass. Our eyes locked, marveling at ourselves, understanding the passion, the basic need we had for each other.

My nuts vibrated every time his cock hit that spot, sending current directly to my dick and I'd begun to recognize the intense feeling, needing it, wanting it. I'd never used drugs in my life, but if this were available on the street, I'd be an addict. "Fuck it harder! Come on, give it to me!"

I felt Caleb's grip on my hips tighten as he was preparing to blast his nut in my ass. His breathing was heavier, and he was grunting hard. My ass was on fire with a pleasure I'd never felt, it was there, hiding and waiting to come forward. My cock was throbbing and leaking, his cock rubbing hard against something in my hole. *What the fuck was it?* I felt the load in my balls engage, ready to blast, as he had put all of his focus on my ass.

"OOOHHHH FUUUCKKK, Joey!" he roared, letting out an animalistic groan. He thrust his hips forward and his head back, "It's… coming man… I feel it… coming, man… Holy, Jesus! Fuck! Shit!" He'd completely lost his shit, using words he'd heard, but never used.

The magic button I'd just discovered in my ass was beyond my control now and I felt my load coming up the shaft as I was jacking my dick, my ass was being abused from behind. *Here it is, hit that spot, yes… yes.* My entire body wracked in orgasm. Flashing points of light exploded in my eyes as I felt that sweet spot in my ass blow up with a feeling I'd never felt, providing an orgasm unlike any I'd ever experienced. I moaned uncontrollably, like a wounded animal and released my load; I could hear Caleb grunting loudly through the exploding pleasure in my own mind.

"Yeah! Fuck yeah! Oh! Fucking hell, Joey!"

He slammed in one final pump and then fell onto my back. His weight and my completely drained body causing us to collapse to the mattress. His breathing was heavy, and he was still inside me. His dick twitched and retreated slowly until it slid out of me.

He held me tightly and nuzzled my neck. "I love you so much, Joey," he whispered. "I'm sorry if that was too much. I just… I don't

know, just… lost control of myself."

He rolled over to his side, and I flipped over too, coming face to face with him. "Sorry for that? Don't be. Whatever… whoever that was, I liked him. It was fucking amazing, baby." I pressed my mouth on his and we gently kissed as our breathing slowed down. We held each other in a loving embrace, touching our lips to each other's chests and shoulders. Slowly, sweetly, wild Caleb was washing away, as my sweet angel reappeared.

He snuggled deep into the crook of my neck. "You going to church soon?" I whispered.

"Huh? Why you asking?"

"Those curse words you were just spouting, I'm guessing some sins need forgiving."

"Yeah? Well, fuck that!"

Maybe wild boy wasn't leaving… not entirely.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE: CALEB

I woke up to noises coming from the big stone fireplace. Joey had repositioned the iron skillet back onto the rack, after rebuilding the fire. He was apparently as hungry as I was after an afternoon and evening full of excitement. There was nothing like his Gram's stew to get you back into shape for round three, maybe even four? The flame illuminated the outline of his naked body in an otherwise dark room. We'd slept for an hour or so and it was pitch-black outside. I watched as he maneuvered around the fire with practiced ease. The sight of his fluid movements, and the way his perfect bronze skin stretched over his lean muscular body, left me overwhelmed. It hurt just thinking about the love I had for him.

His beautiful long black hair was loose and hanging like a veil, hiding his face from my view. The fire danced off his shiny hair as a muscled forearm reached to place another log into the flame. I let out a small, stretchy yawn to let him know I was awake.

He turned to look back at the bed. He had a disheveled, yet very sexy, sleepy eyed, look going on. Those same eyes needed a moment to adjust to the darkness that hid me, and then a smile spread across his fire-lit face as his vision cleared.

"Hey, baby, look who decided to join the party." He grinned at me, brilliant white teeth glowing from across the room.

"Why don't you crawl back in here… please?" I begged, lifting the edge of the sleeping bag so I could flash my naked body and hard cock at him.

"No problem, stud, but you ain't touching my ass for a few days. It's a bit worn out." He laughed, making a pouty face.

"I'm sorry, Joey. I'm not sure what came over me." I was still slightly embarrassed by my performance. "Please don't tease me about it just yet, I feel a little embarrassed."

“Fuck that, Angel! Don’t be sorry for that shit… at all!” He put another log into the fire.

“You’re sure it wasn’t weird?” I was ashamed and didn’t know what to say. He got up from his knees and moved the screen in front of the fire. I watched as he strode across the room. His dick was semi-hard, proof he wasn’t lying to me; he had liked it.

He slid into bed and put his arm behind my head, tapping his chest to indicate he wanted me to lay my head there. He began weaving his fingers through my hair. Joey had a fascination with the color and texture of my hair. It started right after he’d seen me across the road more than eleven years ago. The sun was shining on my bright blonde hair, and he’d convinced himself I must’ve been an angel.

He playfully squeezed my neck when my head had found his chest. “You wanna bring me up to fucking date on who the hell that was a coupla hours ago?”

“What are you talking about?

“What, my ass, Angel. Who the fuck was that man that basically just owned my ass?” He squeezed my neck with his thumb and middle finger. “Next time, a little heads up might be cool.”

“I’m sorry, Joey, really I am. I don’t exactly know for sure what happened. Probably because of the past two years, you and I messing around, always beating around the bush about our feelings and stuff.”

He laughed. “So… what? You decided to beat around my asshole instead?”

“When I saw your butt exposed to me like that, I got possessed or something. I just think, like, maybe I had too much of the waiting. I didn’t feel like myself, something just came over me.” I ran my hand lightly across his ab muscles. “You think that maybe it’d been bottled up inside and I just got too excited and stuff.”

“Maybe,” Joey offered.

I had to admit, I was as confused as he was about what’d come over me. “Are you sure you like that guy? You don’t think that’s who I

am now, do you?" I asked. "I don't wanna be that guy if you don't like him."

"Aww, Angel, come on! I love you most of all in this world. Nothing you could ever do changes that, mister! But, dude, I gotta know, where did you learn that shit? It seemed like you were a different person today. I mean, fuck yeah! I dug it, baby. I really fuckin' dug it, I ain't gonna lie." He took a breath, thinking hard about his next words. "That version was wild! A fuckin madman, to be honest with ya."

I reached up to grip Joey's hand. "But, too much?"

"Let's get one thing straight here, farm boy. Don't be embarrassed by it, ok? I'm giving you major props right now, son. If you hadn't done all that today, we'd still be lying around, wearing our boxers and ignoring our dicks."

"That's what I mean, Joey. I told myself all week that I was going to at least try to add something extra when I sucked your dick." I still felt uncomfortable talking out loud about sex.

"I've been a chicken shit, and I'm sorry about that. I shoulda asked you too, and been pushing things along faster, but to be honest, I always had you pegged as too strait-laced for some of the stuff I wanted to do. But for fuck's sake, I guess I was wrong, who knew?" Joey said, yanking on my ear lobe affectionately. "Oh yeah and listen up, church boy, you used a shit ton of bad words today. Did you fuckin hear yourself?"

"I know, weird too, huh? I felt possessed, Joey. I had to be closer to you somehow, some way, and like the only way that felt like enough, was to be inside you. I agree, who knew right?" I was feeling horny again, thinking about my crazed self.

"It's all good. Maybe we should try a buncha kinky shit that we both like? Let's agree that we'll be open to trying new shit, really giving stuff a try if one of us wants to. I know the real you, so don't worry about that, but I also really liked the horn dog fucker I just met too. You can bring that nasty fucker out, anytime you want." Joey kissed the top of my head. "Oh, one more thing, country, I heard more *Crows* and *dudes* outta you during one hot session than I've heard outta you in damn near a decade. We might have to talk about that

shit."

All the rehashing about earlier in the evening had gotten to us. I'd been running my hand over Joey's abs, admiring them up close as we spoke, and him still running his fingers through my hair, and I was horny again. I moved my hand up and down over his abs and then my hand brushed against the tip of his erection. His cock jumped at my touch. I gently picked it up and massaged it slowly in my palm. He thrusted his hips from the mattress, pushing against my grip and squirmed, as I continued to run my fingers up and down the exposed underside of his cock.

"Again? Already… Mr. Quarterback?"

He gave me his answer with a rough nudge on the top of my head. "What you think, ya big cock tease? You ain't the only one here than can play rough, farm boy. Now be a sweet boyfriend, will ya, and suck the King's dick again." He gave my head a final shove.

Our plans for some hiking and hunting for pheasant to take home to Joey's grandma were long forgotten. We were two newly discovering, horny boys, fast becoming highly sex-driven men. Yeah sure, we made it to the hot spring pool to bathe a couple times. However, those trips down the trail only led to more sex. I didn't get another crack at his ass, but we did practice our blow job skills. Being eighteen was a good thing, we managed to reload repeatedly.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR: JOEY

My heart sank at the sight of our mailbox ahead. The drive home had been ridiculous and fun, we both found any and every excuse to touch one another. By the time we arrived, it became unbearable to think we would be saying goodbye.

"Stop once you pull into the drive," I said.

He put his right blinker on and slowed down, our mailbox thirty feet away. The same mailbox I stood near when I first noticed the overexcited blond boy across the road, all those years ago. Once we were off Jones Road, and in the entrance to our drive, he stopped the Jeep.

"What's up?"

I released my shoulder seatbelt hurriedly and slid across to the console and grabbed his head in my hands, kissing him with urgency. I had my mouth on him like he was a pool of water in a parched desert. He half laughed and nudged me away.

"Hey, slow down, man. What's this all about? We're back, there can't be any of this in your driveway."

"Fuck! I know, Angel. I fuckin' hate that you're going home though. I'm just missing you already, is all. I love you so much."

The words left my mouth and for once, I said it first. I hadn't shortened it to *love ya*. I hadn't mouthed the words. I hadn't *ditto'd*. I didn't even just say *love you.* I had looked him directly in the eyes and said I love you *so* much. Only Caleb added the *so* to his I love you.

His mouth hung open as he tried to form words. "You… said it," he whispered.

"Calm down," I said, waving the back of my hand at him,

dismissing his words.

"But you did."

"Ok, I did, so… whatever, buzz off about it."

He leaned back slightly, pressing his back against his door to get more distance. "You really do, don't you?" he said, his eyes welling up at the realization of my utterly pathetic need for him in my life. I did love him, and it was, *so much*. I also needed him to be my lifetime person. I was done, for all intent and purpose. Put a fork in me.

"Well duh! Of course, I do, you big dummy."

"Good. Because I love you *sooooo* much too. Now get in your own seat," he said, "and get over yourself tough guy!"

"Caleb, I'm serious. I hate this. I miss you and you're right here," I said, placing my hand on his thigh. I knew I was done for, finished, hook line and sinker. I was *in love* with him. Really and truly *in love*. The adult kind of *in love*. The *I want to be with you forever*, kind. Yep! I was toast.

"I'm always… right here." He reached out and placed his hand over my heart. "And… I'll be right over there, later," he said, using his thumb to gesture behind us and across the field to his house. "Come over if you want. I'll make it worth your while."

"I am so there!"

We didn't know it yet, but there was an unforeseen problem coming. An excessively big problem. One that would alter our lives and the direction we were headed, forever.

If we could see his house from where we sat in the Jeep, someone could see us from there.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE: Joey

The grands were sitting in the kitchen when I walked in through the backdoor. I dropped my shit on the floor and looked at gram. “I’m hungry, gram.” I whimpered, like the spoiled grandson I was.

“You boys ate everything early, didn’t you?” she scolded. “I knew I should’ve packed you two growing boys some extras. Have a seat love, and I’ll warm up some leftovers.”

“Where’s grandpa at?” I asked, after sliding into a chair at the table. I picked up the saltshaker, rolling it around in my hands, marveling at its invention. My stomach growled and my eyes were heavy with needed sleep. Setting the shaker back down near its pepper match, I watched gram float around her command center.

“I thought you boys might see him on the highway as you were heading home. He had to go out to the reservation. I know it’s Sunday, but one of the council members asked if he’d stop by and pick up some paperwork they had for him.” She tapped three minutes on the microwave screen to warm up the leftovers, turning back to me.

“That’s weird, gram. Sunday?”

“That’s exactly what I told your grandfather. I asked why it was so important that he go all the way out there on a Sunday. I swear sometimes…” She fussed and pulled my plate out of the microwave. She lay a napkin in my lap as she set a heaping plateful of goulash in front of me.

“Mmm… yum, gram. Thanks, this shit smells good.”

“Joseph Crow, the third! Not in my kitchen, young man.” Her gnarled-up finger pointed at me, wagging back and forth.

“Sorry, gram. It looks and smells real… nice, ma’am,” I said,

feigning innocence.

"I wished I'd known about the reservation errand. Caleb and I could've stopped and grabbed whatever it was. Coulda saved grandpa the trip."

"That's sweet, son, but I think it's something a bit more serious than just stopping by and grabbing. I'm sure your grandfather will let us know when he gets home. Now eat up before it gets cold again." She wiped her hands on her apron and waited for me to dig in. I gave her the thumbs up after stuffing my mouth and swallowing the first bite.

"I'm gonna take a quick nap after this, ok? It was a long weekend." I placed another heaping forkful into my mouth.

"I'll wake you when your grandad gets home then." And with that, she left the kitchen and went to her favorite lounger in the living room. I'd a hunch she'd be napping too.

I sucked down my late lunch/early dinner and placed the dishes in the sink. The walk up the stairs to my bedroom was the only proof I needed that I was exhausted. Screwing all weekend had been more work than I thought. I walked across my bedroom, shedding clothes as I headed for the window. I'd stripped down to my boxers and yanked the rolling shade down. Last thing I remember was my head hitting the pillow.

Who's yelling? I must be dreaming.

"Joey! Come down here, son." *Was that grandpa?* My mind hadn't woken up. "Joey!" he said, louder this time, "wake up, boy! Can you come down here, please?" It definitely was him, yelling from the bottom of the stairs, adding some volume to his request. He never climbed the stairs if he could help it.

I cleared sleep out of my eyes and yelled back. "Coming!"

I grabbed a sweatshirt and pulled it over my messy hair. I had socks on but didn't feel like putting any pants on. It wouldn't be the first time I ran around in my boxers at home, they'd deal with it. It was dark out, so I figured grandpa had gotten home and wanted to catch me up on his visit. He didn't get out to the reservation much anymore since the whole *leaving the Rez* incident. I was curious about

his errand.

I traipsed down the stairs, yawned and rubbed some more sleep out of my eyes. It was bright in the kitchen, and I heard gram's soothing voice from below. You needed to slightly duck your head as you came down our steep stairs, so you'd miss where the second-story floor became the first floor's ceiling. The stairwell wall opened there, and you could see into the kitchen at that point. *What the…*

Caleb was sitting between my grands and his eyes were red and teary. I looked from gram to grandpa, worry sprinting across my face.

"He's going to be fine, son." Gram took my hand as I leaned over Caleb from behind and hugged him tight. He lay his head onto his crossed arms on the tabletop and sobbed as soon as I touched him.

"Angel, baby, what is it?" I looked at Gram, confusion clear on my face. Grandpa scooted his chair out of my way so I could get closer, and I bent down to my knees. "Hey, it's ok, baby. It's ok. I'm here now. I promise it's gonna be ok." I noticed grandpa's concerned face looking at me.

He was shaking his head left and right, looking concerned and angry at the same time. Caleb slowly sat up and turned to me, falling to my chest. I let him weep on my shoulder until he could compose himself. He was consumed by hiccups as he tried to get it together. I scanned grandpa's face for any hint about what the fuck was going on. Grandpa stood up and motioned me to sit in his chair. I pulled it closer to Caleb and sat down, never releasing my hold on him. Grandpa leaned back against the counter with his hands crossed over his chest.

"He was on the porch when I got home. He apologized for having nowhere else to go, but he hasn't said a damn thing since we got him in the house."

Gram pulled another hanky out of her sweater pocket and laid it in Caleb's lap. There were already two on the table that had been used. "Angel, what's going on?" I lowered my voice to appeal to him to speak. "You're safe here with us, you know that. Nothin's gonna happen to you with the grands here."

Gram reached out and put her hand on his shoulder, offering additional support. The concern on her face didn't escape me. Like my

grandpa, she knew stuff, she felt stuff. “Shhhh, son, it’s going to be just fine,” she whispered. “Tell us what’s happened.” She deployed her kindest consoling voice to coax him to open up.

Caleb lifted his head off my shoulder, and I moved back a few inches from him. I brought my hands down from the sides of his face and rested them in his lap. It broke my heart to see the pain etched on his face and the tears in his eyes. I was hopelessly crushed, the pain almost more than I could take. Seeing him like this, and me not knowing the solution, killed me.

“They saw us, Joey.” He struggled to form the words, hiccupping, trying to catch his breath from crying.

“Who saw us, Angel?”

“My dad. My mom. They were watching us through binoculars when we got home earlier.”

It took my foggy brain a moment. “Oh shit!” I mumbled, remembering the driveway, the kissing, the crawling over the console and basically sitting in his lap. “Oh fuck!” I said, this time out loud, forgetting my grands’ presence.

“When I got home, they were waiting in the kitchen and had all my… had all my…” he was sobbing again and put his hands to his face.

I glanced at grandpa, and he looked even more pissed off than before. He moved his head and eyes to motion to the backdoor, where several large trash bags and a piece of luggage sat. It was slowly dawning on me. “Did they throw you out?”

I pulled him back in my arms again, encouraging him to let it all out. He shook his head in a *yes* motion as he choked back tears. “They did… they… they… told me I was sick and needed God’s help.”

I looked over at grandpa again and felt gram’s hand pressing against my back as she leaned in. I had tears in my eyes as I realized what had happened. *“What?”* I mouthed in my grandpa’s direction. “This is my fault, grandpa. I should never have allowed this to happen.” I pathetically looked to him to save me, and then, there were two eighteen-year-olds crying in the kitchen.

I was horrified at what I'd done to Caleb and to his family. "I'm so sorry, Caleb. This is my fault." I wrapped my arms around him and cried. I would never forgive myself for what I'd done.

Grandpa made an abrupt move to the table, his knee banging a chair on his way, "This is nobody's fault. You two hear me?" He grabbed the nearest chair, sat down and leveled his raised voice. "Joey, stop this nonsense. Your gram and I will not allow you to take any blame for this, you understand me? Who does this bull…" Gram raised a cautionary hand to make sure he wouldn't regret his next words.

"I'm sorry Mr. and Mrs. Crow. I didn't have anywhere else to go. I don't know what I am going to do." He blew his nose and wiped his swollen eyes. "My folks told me that if I don't repent and get help through our church elders, I'm not welcome in my… their home anymore."

I turned from gram to grandpa with pleading eyes. Grandpa had calmed down and spoke with a level voice. "You can stay here. You're welcome here with us, Caleb, for as long as you need. Joey's grandmother and I will support you in every way we can. If you want help speaking with your parents, we can do that too."

Caleb lifted his head and gazed sadly at grandpa. "But I don't have much in my savings, sir, and I don't have a job either. How am I supposed to finish school and go to college if I can't support myself?"

Gram cleared her throat and sat up taller in her chair. "Listen here, son, you're family as far as we're concerned. We managed to feed and clothe one grandson; I'm quite sure we can handle another one."

Caleb smiled weakly and leaned toward my gram and she pulled him in for one of her famous *gramma* hugs. There was no greater comfort for me than to see the love of my life in her arms. I knew we'd be safe. I knew that Caleb would be loved here. We had my grandparents and we had each other. We would be a family.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX: Joey

Thirteen years ago

The beating drums and mesmerizing vocals coming from the dancers had me enthralled as I sat on my daddy's lap watching the event. The excitement and the beautiful costumed dancers made me proud to be part of our strong native community. The annual powwow took place on our reservation all weekend long, and I had a front row seat to it. My grandfather was an elder of our tribe and my daddy was next up to dance, representing the long tradition of Crow family dancers. I'd been watching and learning everything I could, as my daddy practiced his many movements. One day, it would be me, Joseph Crow III, the next generation that would represent our lengthy Crow history.

But until then, I was snuggled in my daddy's lap as grandpa, gram and my mommy finished putting the final touches on the fancy feathered footwear he'd be wearing. I was staring at the necklace around daddy's neck as the sun's rays bounced from it, flashing over his dark skin. I held the disc in my hand and marveled at the crow that was featured on it. My daddy never took the necklace off, and I knew it held importance in our family.

"You like it, son?"

"I like it a lot," I said, in my sweet five-year-old voice. "It's shiny daddy, and I like the crow on it. I like our name, Crow, too."

"This necklace has been in the Crow family for six generations, Joey. Your grandpa gave this to me on my eighteenth birthday." He smiled at my grandpa who stood nearby, watching and listening to our exchange with pride in his eyes. "The crow is important to our people, son, and it is very important that you learn the strength of the legend," he said.

I continued to wiggle in his lap and tried to keep the small disc in my tiny fingers as he spoke. "Your ancestors saw the crow as a wise

creature that could speak and was a strong friend of our native culture. You must always keep a crow close to your heart and share the strength that he brings to you and our family." He looked around the circle my family had made. "The crow will protect your grands, mommy and daddy, and even you, Joey. One day you will wear the necklace, it will be up to you to protect us all."

I loved hearing my daddy tell stories of the proud Native people and our legends. "How will it protect me daddy, if I don't have it on?" I asked, sincere in my concern of not being protected without it.

"You're protected because I wear it today. My father, your grandpa, also wore this before I was eighteen, and it protected me then as well."

"So, we are all gonna be protected, daddy? Even mommy gets protected?"

"Yes, son, and you will get to wear this very necklace when you turn eighteen. I will be enormously proud to share it with you for you to protect all the Crow family."

I held the necklace in my little hands and wished I could wear it now, instead of waiting till I was eighteen. But I knew my daddy would be the best protector and the crow would be safe with him.

My father lifted me off his lap and tossed me high into the air and planted a big kiss on my face. "I love you, little Joey Crow, big protector of our family."

I watched as he walked onto the field, his proud outline bathed in sunlight. His Crow family regalia sparkled, his long black hair tied with traditional bands, while the feathers twirled and danced in the breeze. He prepared himself to represent us all… one final time.

"I love you too, daddy."

EPILOGUE: Joey

Caleb and I settled into one of the small one-bedroom cabins on the farm. Gram helped us gather some old furniture she found on Craigslist and stocked our kitchen with dishes and pots and pans. I don't know why she did it, considering we ate practically every meal in the main house.

After the shock of Caleb's parents asking him to leave had worn off, we all settled into a family routine. The grands enjoyed having him around. He was hardworking and a welcome addition to the Crow farm. He had whipped the farm into shape with his repairs to our structures, keeping inventory of and repairing equipment. He also had several suggestions for grandpa to expand his land lease opportunities. He even assisted gram in setting up an impressive garden in the late Spring. He suggested to grandpa that they plant a few fields to bring some extra money into the farm. Caleb was very savvy from his years on his own farm. Grandpa was delighted by his enthusiasm. He told us that once we had our college educations under our belts, if we wanted to come back to the farm, we could do all those things and more.

Caleb joined me that summer working at the marina over at the Cove Palisades. Every two weeks he'd try to convince the grands to take his paycheck. Of course, they just put their hands up to wave him off. We still managed to spend every lunch break at our favorite rock, doing our favorite things. Naturally, those lunch breaks had become more intense than previous summers.

The communities around Madras and Bend had been outraged by the news that Mr. Alexander Sr. had been responsible for my parents' murders. The story ran lead on every local station and throughout Oregon. The fact that such a brazen crime was committed by such a well-known business leader was all anyone could talk about.

His son, Landon Jr., with the help of an unnamed woman at county, had managed to find old emails, records and bank account information that he gave to the Portland FBI. The FBI had used this well-hidden trail to find suspects that brought the case right back to Alexander Developers, and Mr. Alexander Sr. himself.

Apparently, my dad's unwillingness to agree to the sale of reservation land twelve years ago, had led Alexander Sr. to solving the problem himself. Landon Jr. was proven to have zero culpability involving his father's actions; however, the Alexander Development Company was in shambles after the arrests. There have been no announcements from the Alexander family regarding the future of one of the largest developers in Oregon. All the "*coming soon*" real estate development site signs around the Cove Palisades area were faded and crumbling. A sad and vivid reminder of the fall of The Alexander Companies. Landon Jr. refused to be interviewed and had not been seen around Madras for many months. Caleb and I didn't know it yet, but we hadn't heard the last from Landon Jr.

The day that Caleb showed up on our porch after being kicked off his family's farm, did actually bring better news for me and ultimately him too. Grandpa had been at the reservation that Sunday for a meeting with the tribal council. They'd requested his presence to settle outstanding tribal business. The purpose of the meeting was to give my grandpa my parents' proceeds from the land sale that had gone through all those years ago. It included a nice amount of interest too. Now that the tribe had received confirmation of my parents' deaths, they were obligated to pay the heirs. The only heir to those funds was me. My grands had never spent their shares from the sale. They couldn't find it in themselves, considering my dad was missing, and had put the funds away for my future instead. Knowing that mom and dad's spirits were home and fulfilling their destinies, the grands felt right giving it to me.

My college education was secured through the tribal endowment for Native Children, so I was free to choose any school I wanted to attend. I also had enough money in the bank that I was able to secure an education for my mate as well. Neither Caleb nor I would have to work during our undergrad years. Gram preferred things that way so *her* boys could focus on their education. Both of us liked hard work, so we figured we'd find something to do in our new destination and spend summers working here at the farm. The grands told us that they wished for us to have the farm if we decided to work on one in the future. They'd decided to return to the reservation to live out their

final years after we graduated college. The tribal council was horrified at the news of how my parents had lost their lives and went out of their way to welcome them back to their beloved land. A scholarship had been established in my parents' names, funded by the tribe. It was my wish to fund it as well, considering it was named for our family. The Crow Flies Free Memorial Scholarship Fund was awarded annually to a deserving tribal student seeking higher education.

A month before Caleb and I were due to start our freshman year at college, I received a package from FedEx. The return address was from the Portland office of the FBI. Our new, larger family had just finished another of gram's delicious meals when I remembered it was in the living room where she'd left it, so I excused myself and went to grab the small box. All eyes were expectantly watching me after I sat back down at the table and pulled my pocketknife to cut the clear tape that sealed it. There was shredded paper around an envelope inside that I recognized having seen before. The small beige envelope still had the word *EVIDENCE* stamped across it. My hands were trembling to the point that I gave up and handed it to grandpa and asked him to open it for me. My heart was beating fast, and I felt dizzy as grandpa pulled the envelope apart and lifted the necklace out. He held it in the air as it twirled in the kitchen light, the reflections spinning around the room like speckles of gold. Grandpa and gram's eyes were filling with tears. There it was, the crow necklace, finally back where it belonged. Grandpa stood and came up behind me to hang it around my neck. After the clasp engaged, he left his hands on my shoulders and I gazed teary eyed across the table at gram and Caleb. My beloved grands and the love of my life, my mate, my path sharer, all here to welcome my parents' spirit home. Eleven years of loneliness and abandonment disappeared as I looked around the table at my family. I reached my hand to my neck and held the disc gently. I would be protected. I would protect Caleb, and I would protect my grands, whom I loved so much. My parents' remains were at rest on our ancestral lands. Caleb was by my side and after eleven long years, I was whole again.

Caleb and I begin our college adventure in September at The University of Washington in Seattle.

THE END

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About The Author

Michael Robert

Michael Robert is an author residing in Seattle, Washington. The Crow Flies Free is his debut novel. Michael enjoys traveling and he aspires to visit the locations of his upcoming novels so as to provide vivid and accurate descriptions of them. He enjoys tennis, road trips and fast cars. Please look for his future projects, the next story coming soon.